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THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY ON THE BOOKS OF KINGS

THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES, INDEXES, ETC., ETC.

By VARIOUS AUTHORS

In Twenty-One Volumes

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
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A HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOKS OF

KINGS

BY THE
REV. GEORGE BARLOW

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PREFACE

No pains have been spared to make this volume a thoroughly usable and suggestive Homiletic Commentary on the two Books of Kings. Every available work bearing on the subject has been consulted and made to contribute its choicest passages, either in exposition or illustration. What every explorer in this field must have discovered before, the homiletical material on the Books of Kings is exceedingly scanty, and there are many paths the writer has been compelled to traverse alone, and for the first time, so far as any known literary record bears evidence. The remark of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, in his valuable little work on *Commenting and Commentaries,* has been often painfully realized: "We have next to nothing on the Books of Kings."

The student will readily detect the plan on which the work has been carried out. Each chapter is prefaced by "Critical and Explanatory Notes," which elucidate any word or sentence in the original text thought to be of use and value to the exegete. These "Notes" are from the practised pen of the Rev. W. H. Jellie, the author of the scholarly and elaborate Commentary on JEREMIAH in this series. The paragraph on which the main homily is constructed consists of as many verses as contain a complete subject. For the "Germ Notes," this paragraph is again minutely scrutinized, and every verse, or part of a verse, that suggests matter for homiletic treatment, is utilized, together with any outline, or pithy and illustrative comment, from other sources.

The practical aim has been to bring together, within the smallest compass as much homiletical material on the subject of the paragraph as will be suggestive to the thoughtful sermonizer in working out his own original composition.

Of the seven hundred and forty-three outlines, brief or more extended, contained in this Commentary, one hundred and eighty-seven are from the pens of other writers. In every case where the author's name is not appended the outline is original.

Among the principal works consulted in the progress of this Commentary are:—*Lange's* Commentary on the Books of Kings (written by Dr. E. Harwood and W. G. Sumner, B.A.); *Keil's* Commentary on Kings; *Whedon's* Commentary (by Milton S. Terry, A.M.); *Dr. R. Jamieson's* Critical and Experimental Commentary; *The Speaker's* Commentary; *Trapp's* Commentary; *Pool's* Annotations; *Dr. Kitto's* "Daily Bible Illustrations"; *Maurice's* "Prophets and Kings"; *Bishop Hall's* "Contemplations"; *Stanley's* "Jewish Church"; and *Geikie's* "Hours with the Bible."

In the prosecution of this work, the constant effort has been to seize and develop the moral teaching interwoven with the details of the history, to show how the fluctuations of national prosperity and disaster were conditioned on the fidelity or treachery of Gods convenant people, and to apply the lessons derived from the Divine treatment of the Israelites to the national life of to-day. Thus viewed, the history becomes not a mere desiccant record of facts, but pulses with life and meaning.

GEO. BARLOW

Hexham, April, 1885

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

FIRST BOOK OF KINGS.

Introduction.

THE two books of Kings originally constituted one continuous work, the division into two portions being made in the printed edition of the Hebrew work by Bomberg, in 1518. They are essentially historical in their character, though the history throughout has an evident moral drift. The work was composed, probably by Jeremiah, during the second half of the Captivity. The object of the writer appears to be to place before the exiled and sorrowing Jews a faithful picture of their history from the period when the kingdom reached the highest pitch of national glory under Solomon, to its declension and fall. The history is written not so much from a civil, as from a religious point of view. The Jews are regarded not as an ordinary nation, but as the people of God with whom He has entered into covenant. The historian refers to civil events only so far as they illustrate the moral condition of the nation, and the Divine dealings with it. He traces the various steps in the moral probation of the captive race, and exhibits their conduct under such probation in its true light. In the full career of Solomon's prosperity and magnificence, the author sees and notes the fatal taint of evil, the inclination towards idolatry, which is to gather strength, and increase, and finally to bring about the complete rejection of both Israel and Judah. The sun of Solomon sets amid clouds, and henceforth the narrative is marked by a pervading spirit of deep melancholy, which is not wholly cast off even when the most pious monarchs are its subject, and the most glorious deliverances have to be spoken about.* In the darker characteristics of the later history God has presented to mankind another illustration of the deep depravity of human nature, and its invariable tendencies, not heavenward and upward, but earthward and downward; not to a transcendental perfection, but further and further still from God and hope and peace. For we see that till Christianity came, human corruption made even permanent national prosperity impossible. A perfect kingdom cannot come till there is a perfect nature; and a perfect nature can only be a thing of the future when the crowned and conquering Messiah shall establish over this scene of strife and confusion His universal kingdom of righteousness and peace. The Jews at the period of the Captivity were probably exercised by anxious doubts relative to the accomplishment of the Divine promises.† The history of human nature is the same in all ages and among all nations; and there are instructive lessons to be learnt by a comparison of modern with ancient times. The design of this Commentary is not to furnish historical information, which may be readily gained from so many sources; but to aid in tracing the dealings of God with man in varied conditions, in searching out the moral truths that lie underneath alike the great and trivial events of national and individual life, in interpreting the suggestive teachings of the Old Dispensation in the light of the New, and in applying the lessons derived from the manifold aspects of the Divine movements in history in their practical bearing on moral conduct.

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* *Rawlinson's Introduction.*
† *Garbett's Divine Plan.*

CHAPTER I.

SCENES IN THE CLOSING CAREER OF A GREAT KING.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—The opening word, "now," is *and*, the *cop.* ו indicating the unbroken connexion of this book with a prior record. Originally the books of "Kings" were a continuation of those of "Samuel," and constituted one whole narrative, styled respectively the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Books of Kings; and the four books bear a common heading in the LXX. and Vulgate.—Verse 1. David was old—In his seventieth year (compare chapter ii. 11 with 2 Samuel v. 4, 5). Verse 2. Get heat—An established medical fact that the aged and sickly may thus derive vital warmth from the young and healthy. Josephus calls these "servants" who advised this course *physicians* (Ant. vii. 14, § 3). Verse 3. Shunemite—Shunem, five miles south of Tabor, on the table-land of Esdraelon. Verse 5. Adonijah, son of Haggith—No record of origin or rank of Haggith, therefore probably without any family distinction. Adonijah was David's fourth son, and the eldest now alive. Exalted himself—הִתְנַשֵּׂא (*cf.* Proverbs xxx. 32); took advantage of his father's feebleness to claim the throne. But God was king in Israel, and he retained the unchallengeable right of selecting the occupant of the throne (Deuteronomy xvii. 14). Verse 6. He also was a very goodly man—This would give him acceptance with the nation (1 Samuel ix. 2). Verse 7. Conferred with Joab, commander-in-chief of the army, through whom Adonijah hoped to win military support, and Abiathar, the High-priest, through whom he sought sacerdotal sanction and help; and he gained it, עִזְרָאֲהַר "to help one so that men immediately follow him" (Keil). Verse 9. Slew sheep and oxen, &c.—This usurpation of the throne inaugurated by a sacrificial feast. En-rogel, the well or source of the Rogel; south-east of Jerusalem in *βασιλικῷ παραδείσῳ* (Josephus). Verse 12. Save thine own life, &c.; for had the scheme of Adonijah succeeded, all rivals to the throne would have been slain. Verse 13. Assuredly Solomon, &c.—The particle כִּי scarcely allows of so forcible a rendering; saying, *That* Solomon shall reign. Verse 14. Confirm thy words: דְּבָרֶיךָ מִלֵּאתִי אֶת—I will make full thy words—a phrase used for the fulfilment of divine utterances (chapters ii. 27, viii. 15, 24). Verse 16. Bowed and did obeisance—The latter word denoting the prostrate attitude customary in the East before kings. Verse 21. Shall be counted offenders—Counted is not in the Hebrew, though implied in the connexion; they will be חַטָּאִים—*i.e.*, guilty of a capital crime, treated as traitors deserving death. Verse 25. God save King Adonijah: *i.e.*, Let the king live; literally, *Live the king!* the usual Israelitish acclamation (chapter v. 34-39; 1 Samuel x. 24, &c.). Verse 31. Let my lord, King David, live for ever—A form of blessing, used by the Hebrews only on specially solemn occasions, but was a common form amongst the Persians (Daniel iii. 9, v. 10, vi. 22; Nehemiah ii. 3). Verse 33. Take the servants of your lord: viz., the royal body-guard (verse 38). Ride upon mine own mule—The command that he "ride" was especially significant, for no one, under pain of death, might mount the king's mule; to ride thereon was an actual declaration that he was king. A she-mule, פִּרְדָּה, because more docile and enduring than the male. Gihon—A pool or fountain on the west side of Jerusalem; favourable as a scene for a vast assemblage, and removed sufficiently from En-rogel to avoid a collision with Adonijah's adherents. Verse 34. Anoint him—Done only in the case of a new dynasty or disputed succession. Verse 35. Sit on my throne—David would resign it to Solomon. Over Israel and over Judah—The kingdoms were not yet separate, but the union of the names was designed to arrest the growing disposition to separation which the envy of Ephraim was fostering. Verse 39. An horn of oil out of the tabernacle: the priestly consecrated oil, prepared according to divine directions (Exodus xxx. 22–25); the king was thus emphatically "the anointed of the Lord." Verse 40. People came up after him—*i.e.*, to Zion, the citadel. Verse 47. King bowed himself upon his bed—His infirmities allowed him to do no more (compare Genesis xlvii. 31). Verse 50. Caught hold on the horns of the altar: an act by which he appealed to God and man that his life, forfeited by his attempted usurpation of the throne, might be spared. Originally the place was appointed as an asylum for accidental homicides (Exodus xxi. 12 *sq.*), but later on other transgressors sought and found refuge there, befriended from the penalty of their crimes. Verse 53. Go to thine house: be content with privacy, remain in seclusion, aspire not again; in so doing he was to show himself a worthy man, *vir probus*. Such an act of clemency by Solomon towards his rival was a noble inauguration of his kingly rule, and must have both favourably affected the nation and conciliated the followers of Adonijah.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-4.

THE WINTER OF LIFE.

I. Overtakes men in the highest rank. "Now King David was old and stricken in years." Even the monarch is not exempt from the paralysing influence of life's winter. David had just escaped from the terrible plague which had smitten fatally 70,000 of his subjects, only to waste away more gradually under the remorseless ravages of time, from which there is no escape but in death. If men escape one peril it is only to meet another. The holiest soul dwells not in an impregnable fort. The aged king had projected a great work—the building of the temple—and made vast preparations for it. He was not permitted to finish it. As the frosts of winter arrest the growth and development of the most magnificent tree, so the progress of life's bleak winter interrupts the work of the most gifted.

II. Chills the vital sources of the naturally robust. "And they covered him with clothes, and he gat no heat." As a youth, David was noted for beauty and physical strength—"was ruddy and of a fair countenance." He scarcely knew the limit of his power. He hesitated not to attack and slay a lion and a bear—was the victor of Goliath—the terror of the Philistines—the hero of a hundred fights. But, as the shadows of the grave creep into the midst of the gayest scenes of our mortal life, so, in the mid-career of those exploits which raised him into fame, there were admonitory blasts of the coming of that winter which must ere long freeze the vital energies at their source. Exposure, hardship, suffering and sorrow, wore down a constitution naturally robust; and now, in his 70th year—a period when many are still vigorous—David was greatly enfeebled. He was also suffering from a wasting disease to which frequent allusion is made in the Psalms. Coverings and garments can only preserve and accumulate the heat actually existing in the body, but cannot supply that which is gone. An affecting picture of the pitiable weakness of a once powerful and victorious monarch! Let not the mighty man glory in his might.

III. Is but temporarily alleviated by the best considered human devices. The cherishing of Abishag was—1. *Advised by the court physicians.* An expedient not unusual in similar cases, when internal cordials failed, and with the limited skill of the faculty in the use of warmth-creating potions. 2. *Was innocent.* Suggested for no other than purely medical reasons. In those days, when polygamy was not forbidden by the Jewish law, and when perverted views as to the relation of the sexes were so prevalent, Abishag was recognized as David's wife. She ministered to him also as a nurse. Sophocles lauded old age as a deliverance from the tyranny of the passions, as an escape from some furious and savage master. 3. *Suspended only for a brief season the inevitable progress of decay.* Medical skill is no more efficacious for the monarch than for the humblest subject. David died within the year. A moment comes in the winter of life when the warm pulse is stilled, and the once stalwart frame is locked in the icy embrace of death.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 5-10.

THE REVOLT OF ADONIJAH.

I. Was the outcome of a spirit of arrogance and vanity (verse 5). Solomon had been designated by both Jehovah and David as successor to the throne, and this had been publicly declared. But Adonijah, presuming upon his seniority, and puffed up with pride, insolently strove to prevent by force the accomplishment of what he knew to be the Divine arrangement.

'Vain men, whilst, like proud and yet brittle clay, they will be knocking their sides against the solid and eternal decree of God, break themselves in pieces." —*Trapp.* Like his brother Absalom, his prototype in rebellion, Adonijah assumed all the external show of royalty—had a great retinue of chariots and horsemen, both for state and protection, to wait upon and fight for him. The glitter of outward display always attracts the multitude. There is no limit to the pride and extravagance of a rebel. Absalom-like, ambition rideth without reins.

II. Aggravated as committed against an indulgent and aged parent (verse 6). Adonijah took advantage of his father's growing infirmities to gratify his sinful ambition. Had never known the wholesome discipline of parental restraint. "The indulgence of parents at last pays them home in crosses." Reminds us of Prince Henry, in Shakespeare's Henry IV., part ii., scene 5. It added not a little to the grief of the dying king that the trumpet of rebellion should be sounded in his ears by the son whom he had loved "not wisely, but too well."

III. Succeeded in corrupting men of the highest reputation (verse 7). Joab, as commander-in-chief, had formerly done David noble service in most difficult and troublous times. He had incurred the displeasure of the king by his unwarrantable murder of Abner and Amasa; and, probably, he disliked the character of Solomon as a man of peace. For the history of Joab see 2 Samuel ii. 13-32; iii. 22-31; x. 7-14, &c. The defection of Abiathar, the high priest, was more surprising. He was son of that Ahimelech who suffered death in David's cause, and the only one of his sons who escaped the massacre by Doeg. David seems to have felt towards him a special tenderness. Hitherto they had been the firmest friends. Abiathar was with David through all his wanderings when he fled from Saul—served him as priest in Hebron—accompanied him out of Jerusalem when Absalom rebelled—was one of his chief counsellors. The addition of these two representatives of the church and camp mightily strengthened the cause of Adonijah, and was significant of the charm of his personal presence, and bland, insinuating address. "Outward happiness and friendship are not known till our last act. In the impotency of either our revenge or recompense it will easily appear who loved us for ourselves, who for their own ends."

IV. Stimulated and bribed by excessive festivity (verse 9). Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, and he is not the only one whose appetite has proved stronger than his conscience. Sensual feasting is often the precursor of thoughtless, perilous conduct. The judgment is unhinged, the heart inflamed with a fictitious bravery. Many commit themselves to measures which in calmer moments they regret. Such as serve their own belly, and will be in the interest of those that will feast them, what side soever they are of, are an easy prey to seducers (Rom. xvi. 11).—*Matt. Henry.* If the oxen were offered in sacrifice, as some think, it only added to the audacity and impiety of the proceeding. Such a mockery of worship is hateful to God, and can end only in disaster to the promoters. The triumph of the wicked is short (Job xx. 5)

V. Powerless to vitiate the integrity of the faithful (verses 8, 10). Zadok performed the offices of chief priest at the tabernacle of witness at Gibeon, while Abiathar was the real high priest, and officiated at the sanctuary containing the ark of the covenant in Zion. Benaiah was chief of David's body-guard (2 Sam. viii. 18; xx. 23). Nathan, the prophet, might be counted among Solomon's staunch friends. Had given the infant prince the name of

Jedidiah, "darling of Jehovah," and was probably entrusted with his education. As representative of the Divine aspect of the arrangement, and privy to all David's plans, he fully approved the order of succession which the king was known to intend. Shimei and Rei are supposed to be David's two brothers Shimma and Raddai. The mighty men were the company of 600 originally formed during David's early wanderings (1 Sam. xxv. 13; xxvii. 2), and afterwards maintained as the most essential element of his standing army (2 Sam. xxiii. 8-39; 1 Chron. xi. 9-47).—*Speaker's Comm.* Neither these worthies nor Solomon were invited to the feast. It would only have added insult to the wrong. High integrity of character lifts man above many solicitations to evil. Tacitus observed that the statues of Brutus and Cassius were the more glorious and illustrious because they were not brought out with other images in a solemn procession at the funeral of Germanicus. Cato said he would rather men should question why he had no statue or monument erected to him, than why he had. By not inviting Solomon, Adonijah betrayed his plans, and himself gave the occasion for their frustration. The policy of the wicked is short-sighted, and often helps the cause it seeks to hinder (Psalm lxix. 23; Romans xi. 9).

Lessons:—1. *Pride is a fruitful source of rebellion.* 2. *Rebels do not sufficiently estimate the power of the principles they oppose.* 3. *Rebellion is reckless in its movements.* 4. *Rebellion conceived in arrogance is doomed to a humiliating defeat.*

REMONSTRANCE WITH EVIL DOERS—Verse 6.

We are taught here that much of the evil that Adonijah did had its root in his early bad training. David, though a good man and a great king, sadly erred in his treatment of his children. What a sad glimpse do we get here of his domestic life! What is written is for our admonition. Learn—

I. That remonstrance with evil doers is an imperative duty. "Why hast thou done so?" Thus should he have spoken. "His father." None able to speak with such authority and tenderness. So others, according to their place and relationships. Hear God's call to arms: "Who will rise up for me against the evil doers?"

II. That remonstrance with evil doers is a very difficult duty. "Displeased." Pride hurt; carnal security disturbed; conscience roused to give pain; danger of speaking harshly; of speaking the truth in wrath more than in love. Still must do what is right. Better offend men than God; better speak, than by silence imperil souls. Besides, if you act in time you may gain your brother.

III. That remonstrance with evil doers is a much neglected duty. Here a father, and that father David, is charged with failure. Who, then, is safe? The very fact that the duty is so difficult and delicate makes many shrink from it. They will not give pain. They fear the consequences of rebuke and discipline. But though the neglect of this duty is so common, this does not make the guilt the less. It is a sin against God, and a crime against your brother. Take heed; be warned by many fearful examples. Innocence is better than repentance. Better far to "displease" your children now by kind and righteous correction, than to let them go on in sin without check, and, in view of their sad fate and terrible upbraidings, to cry, "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O Lord!" Besides, how much higher a place will the father hold who rules as a king, like Abraham (Gen. xviii. 19), than the man who weakly abuses his trust like Eli (1 Sam. iii. 13).—*Homilist.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-4. Weakness and infirmity in old age are—1. The universal lot to which we must all consider ourselves appointed (Psalm xc. 10). 2. Should loosen the bands which hold us to the temporal and perishable, and ripen us for eternity (2 Cor. iv. 16-18). Old and sick people should, and it is expected of them as a work well pleasing to God, that they bear this with a willing heart, with patience, self-denial, and sacrificing love.—*Lange.*

Verse 5. **Adonijah's attempt to gain the crown.** 1. *The ground upon which it rests.* 1. Upon self-assertion, pride, lust of power; but God resisteth the proud, and a haughty spirit goeth before a fall. 2. Upon outward qualities, age, and beautiful person; but 1 Sam. xvi. 7; Psalm cxlvii. 10, 11. 2. *The means which he employed.* 1. He seeks to impose upon the people by chariots and horsemen; but Psalm xx. 8. 2. He conspires with false and faithless men, but they forsake him in the hour of danger (verse 49; Psalm ci. 6, 7). 3. He prepares, for appearance sake, a religious festival; but Prov. xv. 8.

The effort after high things (Rom. xii. 16). Now many a person thinks: I will become a great personage, a man of authority and influence, and then scruples at nothing to attain his goal. But that which is written in 1 Cor. vii. 20-24 applies to the individual as well as to entire classes.—*Lange.*

Verse 6. **The inevitable retribution of parental indulgence.** In its effect—1. *Upon character*, engendering—1. Vanity, conscious of personal beauty, fond of display. 2. Pride "exalted himself." 3. Recklessness. (*a*). Disrespect of a parent's love. (*b*). Indifference to a parent's sufferings. 2 *Upon conduct.* Seen—1. In deliberate opposition to the Divine intentions. 2. Defiance of parental authority. 3. Usurpation of parental rights. 4. Dissension in the household. 5. Abuse of property.

I. His father made a fondling of Adonijah. II. He, in return, made a fool of his father.—*M. Henry.*

The father who allows his son to go on in his pride and in worldly or sinful conduct, and shuts his eyes, not to trouble him, must expect that his son will trouble him and embitter the evening of his life. The fond parent is generally punished in the ingratitude and opposition of those very children whom he has most indulged, for they cannot be influenced by any sense of obligation or duty who have been accustomed to be gratified in every wish of their hearts (Prov. xxix. 17).

Verse. 7. **The instability of human friendship.** 1. Begins in misunderstandings, and is fostered by imaginary wrongs. 2. Characterized by ingratitude to our greatest benefactors. 3. Culminates in bitter hostility and revenge. 4. Disastrous in proportion to the intimacy formerly enjoyed.

— **Wickedness sometimes unites strange elements.** 1. Knows where to select its accomplices—among the ambitious, the disaffected, the wavering. 2. Combines its votaries in sympathy, aim, mode of operation, and vengeance, against a common foe. 3. Formidable and dangerous when espoused by men of high repute.

— High personages always find people for the execution of their sinful plans, who, from subserviency or desire of reward, from ambition or revenge, will act as counsellors and agents; but they have their reward, and for the most part end with terror (Prov. xix. 21).

Verse 8. **The true value of human friendship tested in trouble.** An incorruptible fidelity—1. Sinks selfish considerations in promoting the common weal. 2. Soothes the alarm and anxieties of the principal sufferer. 3. Is vigilant and active in counteracting the plots of evil workers. 4. Is

a powerful incentive and support in doing the right.

With those who are meditating treason and destruction we should never make common cause (Prov. xxiv. 21, 22).

Verse 9. **Sensual indulgence.** 1. Unfits the mind to estimate the relative value of things. 2. A fruitful source of social and moral corruption. 3. Encourages promiscuous association with questionable characters. 4. Affords a coveted opportunity to artful conspirators. 5. Instigates to all kinds of violence.

— He who gives the crowd wherewith to eat and to drink, who prepares for them festivities and pleasures, makes himself popular and beloved for the moment; but all who allow themselves to be gained in such way, to-day shout Hosanna! and to-morrow, Crucify!—*Lange.*

Verse 10. **A good character.** 1. Places a man beyond the suspicion of treachery. 2. Is honoured, while it is feared and envied, by the base. 3. Saves man from many temptations to evil.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 11-14.

The Counsel of the Wise and Good.

I. Is prompted by an unselfish concern to carry out the Divine will. 1. *The Divine will is the first and highest consideration with a true prophet.* Nathan well knew it was the Divine purpose that Solomon should reign. Doubtless it was he who revealed to David the promise of Jehovah to this effect (1 Chron. xxii. 8, 9). Without blindly and inactively resting on the issue of the Divine decree, he saw the wisdom and importance of using all lawful means to disconcert the wicked attempt to frustrate it. He was not influenced by a priestly officiousness and love of political intrigue, but by the supreme and jealous anxiety to fulfil the will of God. "When crowns were disposed of by immediate direction from Heaven, no marvel that prophets were so much interested and employed in that matter; but now that common Providence rules the affairs of the kingdom of men (Dan. iv. 32) the subordinate agency must be left to common persons. Let not prophets intermeddle in them, but keep to the affairs of the kingdom of God among men." Nathan was indifferent to the personal risk he run had his counsel been rejected and Adonijah allowed to become king. In all things, spiritual and temporal, the will of God is the highest reason. It is the safest motive to action. 2. *The conduct of Nathan was in harmony with a genuine friendship.* The faithfulness of the prophet in reproving David's sin not only produced repentance, but established a bond of friendship which lasted for the remainder of the monarch's life. The training of Solomon was entrusted to Nathan, and the amiable qualities and superior abilities of the youthful prince won the prophet's love. The services of a true friend may be more freely and cheerfully rendered when they accord with the Divine intentions. It is no act of friendliness to tender advice which involves in its observance the displeasure of God. Advice should be given with gentleness and wisdom: it should fall as the dew, not overwhelm as the torrent.

II. Highly valuable in great emergencies. A grave crisis had come in the history of the kingdom. It needed the utmost caution and promptitude in dealing with it. Important interests were threatened. 1. *A crown was at stake* (ver. 11). Adonijah had usurped the position to which his brother was formally designated. There was danger the sceptre should not pass into the hands of Solomon. The crown of life, more lustrous far than the costliest earthly diadem, is reserved for the faithful. That no man take our crown,

we must give heed to Divine counsel. 2. *Life was at stake* (ver. 12). It was the sanguinary custom among the ancient monarchies of the East, in the event of a forcible seizure of the throne, to murder the dethroned ruler, or the opposing pretenders to the crown, and all their nearest relatives (Judg. ix. 5; 1 Kings xv. 29; 2 Kings x. 6, 13; *ib.* xi. 1). If Adonijah succeeded, Bathsheba, Solomon, and, probably, Nathan, must perish. We are in danger of eternal death. It is the privileged function of God's messengers, while warning against threatened death, to offer life. Happy are they who are wise to receive instruction! To keep sound wisdom and discretion is life to the soul and grace to the neck (Prov. iii. 21, 22). 3. *The wish of the dying king was disregarded.* That Adonijah knew the intention of David was evident by his refusing to summon Solomon, and by conducting the conspiracy so secretly that the aged king was ignorant of it. Filial duty dictates a reverential regard to the last wishes of a dying parent. Rebellion outrages all family relationships, and ignores the dearest parental wishes. 4. *The future prestige of the empire was imperilled.* Adonijah was unfit to govern. Had he reached the throne, his career must have been one of disaster. There would have been no Solomon-era; and the peace, the commercial affluence, the luxurious display, the intellectual glory, and theocratic splendour that characterised the brilliant reign of the wise and gifted king, would have been, if not unknown, indefinitely postponed. A prophet and a woman—both contemptuously overlooked by the proud conspirators—were the instruments of defeating an ill-starred enterprise. The timely and vigorous action of a single mind has often decided the destiny of a nation.

III. Suggests the most forcible reasons for right action (verse 13). 1. *The king is informed that his own arrangement concerning the regal succession is violently disturbed.* "Why, then, doth Adonijah reign?" It was a terrible blow to David to be told that his son—a son so fondly loved and excessively indulged—was engaged in a rebellious attempt to defeat his father's declared intention. It would affect David the more that his informant was Bathsheba, a woman he tenderly loved, and mother of the son who would be most injured if the usurper triumphed. Nothing will sooner rouse a man into action than the forcible and wilful interference with his own long-cherished and thoughtfully-formed plans. 2. *The king is reminded of his oath.* "Didst not thou swear?" It is not known when David made the promise on oath to Bathsheba that her son should be king. It was evidently after the revelation made to him by Jehovah, recorded in 2 Sam. vii. The reference to his oath, uttered with the utmost solemnity and awe, would be irresistible. The God-fearing king would be incited to adopt prompt and active measures for ensuring the accomplishment of his purpose. The man who fears God must ever be most solicitous to fulfil the promise made by his solemn invocation of the Divine Name.

IV. Is supplemented and confirmed by active, personal endeavours (verse 14). Many are ready to tender advice when it does not involve personal effort and inconvenience. Advice thus cheaply given is generally estimated at the same value. The true friend, not content with simply giving the wisest counsel, is prepared to substantiate his words with earnest, diligent, and self-sacrificing personal endeavours. The advice of such a friend is beyond all price. It should be gratefully obeyed.

LESSONS:—1. *The minister of God should be able to give sound counsel.* 2. *The best counsel is that which is most in harmony with the will of God.* 3. *The counsel of the wise and good should be carefully pondered.* 4. *Good counsel, when promptly acted upon, is followed with beneficial results.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 11. The watchfulness of the faithful minister—1. Enables him to discern the dangers which threaten the interests of God's kingdom. 2. To discover the secret plots of evil workers. 3. To afford seasonable and important counsel in grave emergencies. 4. To lend all the force of his personal efforts in defeating the designs of the wicked. 5. To brave all the perils of fidelity.

Nathan, the type of a true prophet. Seen—1. In his watchfulness and fidelity (Ezekiel xxxiii. 7). He is not silent when it was his duty to open his mouth (Isaiah lvi. 10). 2. In his wisdom and gentleness (Matt. x. 16). 3. In his earnestness and courage (Matt. x. 28). How grand is this Nathan! How reproving to all who sleep when they should be wakeful, who are dumb when they should counsel, who flatter when they should warn! It is a solemn duty not to conceal what can prove an injury and evil to an individual or to a community, but to expose it at the right time and in the right place, so that the injury may be averted.—*Lange.*

Verse 12. The great burden of the Gospel message. The mission of the Gospel is—1. To counsel the ignorant. 2. To warn the indifferent. 3. To offer life to the spiritually dead. 4. To reveal the endless duration and consummate felicity of the life enjoyed by the believer. 5. To set forth the character and redeeming work of the great Life-Giver.

— What Nathan here says to Bathsheba, Christ and His Apostles, in an infinitely higher sense, say to us all, especially every father and every mother. How many take kindly the good advice of a wise man, for themselves and for their children, in their earthly and outward affairs, but who wish to hear nothing of the best advice which shall bring blessedness to their souls!

Verse 14. The purity of the counsel is confirmed by the accompanying result. There are some seeming contradictions in Scripture; and though they seem to be as the accusers of Christ, never a one speaking like the other, yet, if we understand, we shall find them speaking like Nathan and Bathsheba, both speaking the same things. —*Trapp.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 15-21.

The Persuasive Pleading of an Anxious Mother.

I. Is profoundly deferential. Bathsheba hesitates not to venture at once into the inner chamber of the aged and dying king. Her maternal instincts and concern for her son's future render her courageous. Her presence pleaded eloquently, but her speech, tremulous with the conflicting emotions of the wife and mother, was overwhelming. "Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance unto the king" (verse 16). She paid every respect due to David as her prince and husband. If we would find favour with superiors, we must show them becoming respect. We should cherish a dutiful regard towards those from whom we expect kindness. Nothing is ever lost by sincere politeness. It evidences a refined and gentle spirit. It propitiates the most morose, and often wins a favourable reception in the most difficult suit. It succeeds where an unmannerly brusqueness fails. It is irresistible in a true woman. Life is not so short but there is always time enough for courtesy.

II. Urges the religious obligation of an oath. Verse 17, "Thou swarest by the Lord thy God." A conscientious man is morally bound by his promised word; but an oath is inviolable. We are engaged if we have promised; if we have sworn, we are bound. Neither heaven nor earth has any gyves for

that man who can recklessly shake off the fetters of an oath. Such a man has no regard for that God whose awful name he dare invoke to a falsehood. He who cares not for God will not care for man. It is a powerful leverage to move a man to right action when we can remind him of his solemnly pledged word An oath should be religiously remembered and conscientiously fulfilled. It is a duty we owe to both God and man. Even the highest in authority should be faithfully reminded of this duty, and warned as to the consequences of a careless repudiation of trust. A faithful friend in a palace is rare.

III. Graphically depicts the distraction of rebellion (verses 18, 19). 1. *The throne is seized by an ungrateful son.* "Adonijah reigneth." Without waiting for the death of his father, or seeking his sanction, and even without his knowledge, the presumptuous son assumes all the authority and external display of royalty. Had his right to the succession been ever so good, such conduct was undutiful and treasonable. An unprincipled ambition corrupts natural affection: it acknowledges obedience to none but its own imperious will. 2. *Excessive festivity prevails.* Indulgence is often provocative of vain boasting, extravagant designs, and riotous conduct. It leads to cruelty and disaster. 3. *The members of the royal family and the true friends of the aged king are seduced from their allegiance.* There was disorder in the household. The children of David repaid his paternal kindness with unfaithfulness and wild rebellion. The ingratitude of children, for whom so much has been sacrificed and endured, is one of the sharpest pangs of a disappointed parent's heart. Polygamy, in however limited a degree, is a prolific source of domestic trouble. Any violation of the moral order carries with it its own Nemesis. The infidelity of Abiathar and Joab—men with whom he had repeatedly trusted his life—was a severe blow to David. Little does the renegade friend think of the anguish caused by his treachery. Confidence in human nature is shattered. 4. *The king-designate is ignored.* "But Solomon thy servant"—not thy sovereign, as Adonijah affects to be—"hath he not called." He is evidently regarded as a rival, and every attempt is made to prevent his gaining the throne. It is not an oversight, but a contempt of the act of settlement, which had been made sufficiently public, that Solomon is neglected. All the fondly cherished plans of David are threatened with a rude and ignominious overthrow. The scene of confusion created by the rebels, thus graphically presented, was calculated to deeply affect the dying monarch—as the husband, the father, and the king.

IV. Earnestly advocates the pressing claims of the nation (verse 20). The rebellion had not gone so far as that of Absalom's in stealing away the hearts of the people. There was a grave pause in the kingdom. The people hesitated what to do, until the royal intention was publicly proclaimed. David was too firmly seated in the affections of his subjects to allow them to act without the knowledge of his declared will. This ominous silence of the national voice was Nathan's opportunity and Adonijah's doom. In troublous times the nation looks to the king. In him is vested supreme authority. He is the guide and defender of the empire. The interests of all are in his keeping; and his power should ever be exercised on the side of justice, equity, and peace. A divine sentence is in the lips of the king. "That thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne." This some princes love not to do—Queen Elizabeth, for instance. A false Jesuit wrote that she wished she might, after her death, hang awhile in the air, to see what scuffling there would be for her kingdom. Men should use whatever power or influence they possess, not in compassing their own selfish ends, but in advancing the kingdom of the Messiah.

V. Is full of genuine pathos. 1. *A mournful contingency is referred to* (verse 21). "When my Lord shall sleep with his fathers." Here the heart of

the *wife* speaks out. It was evident David's end was near; and Bathsheba could not contemplate that event without deep emotion. Death is compared to a sleep. Beautiful simile! Such a view robs death of its terror, and soothes the sorrow of the bereaved. Death is but the gentle sinking of the tired and spent body into the lap of rest. Silently it reposes among the hallowed dust of bye-gone generations, until the last great trumpet shall wake it into newness of life. 2. *A tender allusion is made to threatened personal peril.* "I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders." Here the heart of the *mother* speaks out. It is suggested by some commentators that, probably, Adonijah had spoken slightingly of Bathsheba as an adultress, and of Solomon as illegitimate, and, therefore, not fit to be king. The reputation of mother and son was in danger, and must be protected. Not only so: if Adonijah succeeded, they would both be reckoned traitors and public enemies, and their lives sacrificed. Adonijah would not have dealt so mercifully with Solomon as Solomon did with him. He who usurps a throne will stop at no cruelty to secure himself in it. If anything will rouse the soul into earnest concern, it is the peril to which those dear to it are exposed.

Lessons:—1. *The mother exerts a powerful influence on the destiny of the family.* 2. *It is an unspeakable advantage for a youthful prince to have a wise and capable mother.* 3. *The eloquence of a mother's heart is irresistible.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 15-21. Bathsheba before the king. She reminds him of his duty—1. Towards God, before whom he had sworn. What one has vowed before God, according to God's will, one must hold to under all circumstances; of this one must remind kings and princes. 2. Towards the people, whose well-being and whose woe were in his keeping. The great responsibility of him towards whom all eyes are directed. 3. Towards the wife and son, whose happiness and life were at stake. Woe to the father through whose guilt wife and children, after his death, fall into contempt and wretchedness.—*Lange.*

Verse 16. "What wouldest thou?" A question the King of Heaven is ever asking—1. The perplexed enquirer. 2. The penitent suppliant. 3. The complaining sufferer. 4. The solitary mourner. 5. The ambitious self-seeker.

Verse 18. "Thou knowest it not. **The isolation of the aged and infirm**—1. Presents a melancholy contrast to the joyous excitement of an active life. 2. Renders them oblivious of the most important events of the outside world. 3. Ignorant of the calamities that threaten their dearest interests. 4. Familiarizes their minds with suffering and approaching death. 5. Calls for the kindly attention and sympathy of loving hearts.

Verse 20. **The grave responsibilities of the monarch.** 1. All eyes are turned to him in times of national distress. 2. He is expected to promptly and effectually crush rebellion. 3. The best interests of his subjects should be his chief concern. 4. He should make the wisest arrangements for the future peace and stability of the kingdom. 5. He is accountable to God, from whom he derives his authority.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 22-31.

The Expostulation of a Faithful Minister.

Bathsheba retires, and Nathan is announced. No time should be lost in dealing with evil. Delay is all in favour of the enemy. Wickedness hardens in its effrontery the longer it is unchecked. Observe:—

I. That the faithful minister is painfully conscious of wrong done to others. His character supposes familiarity with the highest and purest moral truths. His communion with God gives tone and balance to his personal experience of those truths. His training renders him highly susceptible to every variation from the right. His office, as a divinely-appointed watchman, implies his constant alertness in detecting the presence and operation of evil. As the magnet trembles under the influence of some atmospheric disturbance, so the heart of the faithful minister is sensitively alive to the violence of the wicked. The havoc wrought by sin is the source of bitterest sorrow to the good. He feels the injury done to others more than the injury done to himself.

II. That the faithful minister is sincerely solicitous to rectify the wrong. Without delay, Nathan set all the forces within his reach in motion to counteract the wicked designs of the rebels. When we are conscious of a flagrant wrong, fidelity requires that we protest against it, and use all lawful and wise endeavours to put it away. Man never feels so weak as when he comes into active opposition with the colossal powers of evil. But for Divine encouragement, he would give up the contest in despair. When his best efforts are powerless to conquer the obstinacy of the wicked, like the tender-hearted prophet, he exclaims, "My soul shall weep in secret places for you" (Jer. xiii. 17). What an unfathomable depth of disappointment and regret is sounded in the heartrending wail of the ever-pitying Jehovah—"O! that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!" Even the Deity, after exhausting, in vain, all legitimate attempts to win man back to the right, has nothing left but tears! Christ weeping over Jerusalem.

III. That the faithful minister knows how to influence the highest authority in favour of the right. While the impression made by the passionate pleading of Bathsheba was fresh in the mind of the king, Nathan appeared, and, with the utmost respect, but in a form that implied a slight reproof, expostulated with him. The wood that a single wedge will not rive is readily split asunder by a double one. The prophet rehearsed, for the most part, the arguments used by the mother; but, as befitting his character, he used them in such a way as was calculated to powerfully move the heart of the king. 1. *He expostulated with David as a man of consistency.* "Hast thou said Adonijah shall reign?" (ver. 24). This was contrary to what the king had said before. He had solemnly declared that Solomon should be king; and this was publicly known. This appeal to his consistency would rouse the personal interest of the king. The slightest suspicion of inconsistency alarms the conscientious soul. It is sometimes needful to stir up and encourage to duty those who mean well, but are enfeebled by infirmity. 2. *He expostulated with David as a considerate and popular prince.* Rebellion had broken out, and had reached its highest point of aggravation. The revellers were shouting, "God save king Adonijah!" Beloved as David was by the nation, the rebels had despised his authority, challenged his power, abused his kindness, insulted his friends, and ignored his son (verses 25, 26). All this would tend to fire the indignation of the king. 3. *He expostulated with David as a man of candour* (verse 27). Could it be that the king had changed his mind as to the succession, and kept his truest friend and wisest adviser in ignorance? The man who represented the Divine aspect of the arrangement was surely the first who had a right to know. Had the king been practising secresy and deception? This was unlike David. Few men can bear their candour called in question. The fuse ignited the train. The king was thoroughly roused. Feeble and dying as he was, something of the vigour of his best days re-animated his soul. As the saint, the husband, the father, the prince, he was prepared to enforce his promised word. The mightiest appeal at the Mercy Seat is that which is based upon the Divine Word.

IV. That the expostulation of a faithful minister was in this instance crowned with success. 1. *The king resolved to take immediate action to maintain the right.* "Even so will I certainly do this day" (verse 30). Good men will do their duty, if it is faithfully and judiciously pressed upon them. David's love towards his usurping son gave place to indignation. He now understands the serious state of affairs, and the necessity for prompt measures being taken. The clearness and vigour with which the dying king gave instructions indicate that, notwithstanding the feeble state of his body, his intellectual powers were unimpaired. Age ripens knowledge into wisdom. Plato wrote at eighty years of age, Isocrates at ninety-five, and some of the ablest men who have reached a good old age have grieved that they must die when they began to be wise. Without immediately revealing his purpose to the prophet, David summons Bathsheba into his presence (verse 28). He still retained the power of the king, and of acting independently. The woman who would be so grievously wronged must be assured that justice should be done. 2. *The king renews his oath with increased solemnity* (verses 29, 30). He not only repeats his former oath, but, with deepest emotion, ratifies it with another. An oath is so sacred that its obligation cannot be broken; and so solemn that the impression ought never to be forgotten. David acknowledges the goodness of God in bringing him safely through the difficulties and hardships of life. As God had been true to him, so would he remain true to the end. Dying saints should bear witness of the faithfulness of God towards them. What a lesson was this to his son and successor to trust in God in every time of distress that might come upon him! Bathsheba gratefully acknowledges the decision of the king —"Let my lord, king David, live for ever" (verse 31). Would that it had pleased God that this change had never been necessary, and that thou mightest have lived and reigned perpetually! We should ever desire the prolonging of useful lives, however much it may appear against our own advantage. David acted in this instance, not merely in compliance with the supplication of a wife, or from a dislike to Adonijah, but from a religious motive. He was firmly persuaded that Solomon was appointed by Jehovah to be his successor; and that through him, as well his own house as the house of Jehovah should be built up. This had been promised, and David witnessed its fulfilment (2 Sam. vii. 11-13; comp. Heb. xi. 32, 33).

LESSONS:—1. *That the faithful minister should not tolerate the wrong.* 2. *That the faithful minister will adopt the wisest and most influential method in persuading men to the right.* 3. *That when the expostulations of the faithful minister are regarded, blessed results follow.* 4. *That the minister must be faithful in expostulation, irrespective of results.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 22, 23. To have a Nathan by one's side, who refers at the right time and in the right way to the will of God, is the choicest blessing for a prince. "He who fears God lays hold of such a friend" (Eccles. vi. 16). The ministers of God and the preachers of His word should not, indeed, mingle in worldly business and political affairs; but their calling always requires them to testify against uproar and sedition, for he who resisteth the powers resisteth the ordinance of God (Rom. xiii. 2). With questions which lead to a knowledge of self, he who has the care of souls often accomplishes more, than by direct reproaches and disciplinary speeches.

Verses 28-30. David's decision. 1. His oath is an evidence of his firm faith in the divine promise. 2. His command is a living proof of the truth of the Word (Isaiah xl. 31, and Psalm xcii. 15). Happy for the king who, under all circumstances, observes

what he has promised. Fidelity in high places meets with fidelity from those below.—*Lange.*

Verse 29. **Jehovah the Deliverer of His people.** 1. *That the people of God are not exempt from the calamities of life.* They may be prostrated by disease, perplexed with commercial reverses, disappointed by false friends, distressed with domestic affliction, overwhelmed with bereavement, puzzled with the inexplicable mysteries of the Divine procedure. 2. *That out of every calamity Jehovah graciously delivers His people.* This He does either—1. By removing the cause of the calamity; or, 2, by abating its force; or, 3, by imparting strength to endure, and finally to conquer. 3. *That the constancy of Jehovah in delivering His people should ever be gratefully acknowledged.* 1. Faith is confirmed. 2. Character moulded by the discipline of trouble. 3. Sympathy and fidelity towards others encouraged. 4. Praise should be continually offered.

Verse 30. "Even so will I certainly do this day." **Promptitude in Christian service**—1. Is impelled by a profound conviction of the superlative righteousness of the work to be done. 2. Necessary to counteract the stratagems of the wicked. 3. Demanded by the pressing needs of humanity. 4. Accomplishes the most satisfactory results.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 32-40.

The Coronation of Solomon.

1. Was undertaken with the full approbation and by the express directions of the reigning monarch. 1. *The king voluntarily abdicated in favour of his son Solomon.* "He shall be king in my stead; and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah" (verse 35). No sooner is David roused to comprehend the gravity of the occasion than he proceeds to make the most complete arrangements for carrying out his own intentions and the Divine will. He surrenders into the hand of the youthful Solomon the kingdom which, for the most part, had been conquered and consolidated by his own military and administrative genius. He had subdued Ephraim, which took the name of Israel, and united it with Judah. Considerable jealousy existed between these two portions of the empire, which ultimately forced on a separation. The old disunion reappeared in the revolt of Absalom, and was again revived by the attempt of Adonijah. It was therefore with a view of strengthening Solomon's authority over the whole kingdom that David expressly declared that his son should be ruler over Israel *and* Judah. The abdication of a monarch in favour of a son is not always a wise proceeding. King Henry II. of England lived to regret that he had so acted. Prince Henry, inflated with his new dignity, and instigated to filial disobedience by his mother, rebelled against the king; and in 1183, in the midst of his wicked designs, was seized with a fatal illness, and died. But Solomon had learned better things from his father (Prov. iv. 4), from his mother (Prov. xxxi.), and from his tutor, Nathan. 2. *The king was explicit in his directions* (verses 32-35). He summoned into his presence Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, the chief representatives of the church and the army, and commanded them to take with them the royal body-guard, to set Solomon on his own mule, an honour never conferred but as a mark of the highest distinction; to conduct him in state down to Gihon, there to anoint him with the sacred oil, to sound the trumpet and proclaim him king in the public street; to bring him back to the court in magnificence and triumph, with all the necessary and imposing ceremonies of coronation. The minuteness with which these orders were given indicates the clearness and vigour of David's mind, and the fervour of his soul in doing what he believed to be the right. Zeal for God should ever be controlled by particularity, method, and purpose. 3. *The action*

of the king met with signal approval (verses 36, 37). Benaiah, on behalf of the rest, applauds the act, and adds his devout Amen. He also utters a prayer that Jehovah may be with Solomon, and exalt his throne above that of his father. The best of men desire their children to be wiser and better than themselves; as they themselves desire to be wiser and better. To be wise and good is to be truly great. Benaiah neither flattered not reflected upon David; but, convinced that the king's arrangements were in conformity with the Divine will, he wished that the blessing of heaven might rest upon the newly-formed government. God heard the prayer, and confirmed Solomon's reign, characterized by a lengthened period of civil and religious felicity, representing the triumphant church in heaven, as David's reign had been a figure of the church militant on earth.

II. Was celebrated with becoming solemnities. 1. *There was all the outward display of regal magnificence.* Among the Persians it was a capital offence to ride on a king's horse, to sit on his throne, or to handle his sceptre without the royal permission: on the other hand, to be authorised to mount the royal palfrey was accounted by them the highest dignity. Solomon was placed on the king's own mule, as a token that he was invested with the regal office; and, attended by the principal officers of the church, the state, and the army, with all the external pomp of a royal procession, was conducted down to Gihon, a small brook on the west side of Jerusalem which emptied itself into the Kedron. The Rabbins assert that all the Hebrew kings were anointed beside a fountain or river as a symbol of the perpetuity of their kingdom. It was a spot where a large assemblage could be gathered, and from which an imposing entrance into the city, which had no open public square, could be made. External display is an important means of impressing the people with the majesty of the throne. That was a striking spectacle in the city of Brussels in 1555, when Charles V. abdicated in favour of his son Philip II. (*vide* Motley's Rise of the Dutch Republic, vol. i., chap. 1). What a sight for the universe was that when the triumphant Messiah ascended on high, and was invested with the kingly authority! 2. *There was the solemn anointing.* An oil flask of horn, containing the anointing oil, which was used only for the anointing of priests and kings, was taken out of the tabernacle, where it was always carefully laid up; and Zadok and Nathan anointed the youthful king, one of them pouring out the oil, and the other anointing his head, drawing a circle round about it with oil, according to the maxim that the Hebrew kings were anointed in the form of a crown, to denote their delegation to the royal dignity. The pouring of the oil upon the head symbolized the communication of the Spirit of Jehovah (1 Sam. xvi. 13), and that the king should be endued with all regal virtues, and reign in submission to and for the furtherance of the will of God. The horn of oil was emblematic of power and plenty. The Messiah was anointed to his mediatorial office, not with oil, but with the immeasurable fulness of the Spirit (Psalm xlv. 7). 3. *There was the public proclamation.* Zadok blew his sacred ram's-horn, that gave a far-sounding note, and was specially employed for giving signals, and on other solemn occasions; and, as was the custom on the inauguration of kings, the trumpeters of the guard followed with a loud blast, which announced to the assembled crowd the completion of the impressive ceremony. A shout then went up amid the acclamations of the multitude, "God save king Solomon!" Thus, with all the honours befitting the occasion, and in the most public manner, the youthful prince, at the age of fifteen according to some, of twenty according to others, was raised to the throne of his father David. The kingly character of the Messiah was openly proclaimed to the universe (Psalm xxiv. 7-10).

III. Was the occasion of great national rejoicing (verse 40). The people

escorted their newly-crowned king to the city, and expressed their exuberant joy, after the manner of the Orientals, with the wild music of flutes, with vehement dancing, and with loud enthusiastic plaudits, so that the earth rang again. The excessive jubilation of the whole people showed that they did not side with Adonijah, but accepted the decision of David as authoritative and binding. They saw in the elevation of Solomon a victory over the daring usurper. The coronation of a monarch is a fitting time for national joy; the more so when the character of the king wins the confidence of the people. There is everything in the kingly character of the Messiah to call forth the joyous acclaim of all angelic powers, of all peoples, of all ages.

LESSONS:—1. *A wise king will make the best arrangements for the future stability and peace of his kingdom.* 2. *The accession of a good prince should be celebrated with all due honours.* 3. *All thrones are at the divine disposal.* He disconcerts the most cleverly-conceived cabal, and works through the confusion his own peaceful ends.

THE ACCESSION OF SOLOMON TYPICAL OF THE KINGLY CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

I. Like Solomon, Christ was appointed to the regal office by His Father. Years before the actual event the voice of prophecy declared: "I have set my king upon my hill of Zion" (Psa. ii. 6). Gabriel announced to the Virgin: "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke i. 32, 33). The highest expectations were cherished as to the permanent results of Solomon's brilliant reign; but it was reserved for the true, the later Son of David to fulfil the prophetic yearnings which had gathered round the birth of the earlier. All the weight and magnificence of the Father's authority belonged to the Messiah absolutely (Matt. xxviii. 18).

II. Like Solomon, Christ was established in His throne, notwithstanding the violent opposition of His enemies. The greatest dignitaries of both the Jewish and heathen worlds plotted against the Messiah, and strove to prevent the establishment of his kingdom. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed," &c. (Psa. ii. 2, 3). There had been a similar confederacy among the Ammonites, Syrians, &c., against David, but it was completely crushed. And terrible was the vengeance that fell on the enemies of God's anointed One. The Romans were the instruments of the Divine wrath against the Jews, and, in course of time, punishment fell upon the Romans; the imperial city was captured by the Goths, and the conquered people subjected to the most barbarous cruelties. All opposition to Christ, the Father looks upon as opposition to Himself, and it can end only in unutterable disaster and defeat.

III. Like Solomon, Christ was solemnly anointed. His name, *Christos*, implies it. But the Messiah was not anointed to the regal office with oil. Indeed, the consecrated oil, specially compounded and specially appropriated to the anointing of kings and priests, was lost hundred of years before the birth of Christ, and the custom of anointing in that manner had long ceased. The only anointing of the Messiah of which we read is, *the anointing of the Spirit.* Peter testifies "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts x. 38). And this anointing took place, partly at His conception (Luke i. 35), by which He was prepared for His mission, and more fully at His baptism (Matt. iii. 16), when He formally entered upon the performance of all the functions belonging to His Messiahship. His baptism in the river Jordan

still retained the analogy suggested by the old Jewish custom of anointing kings near a stream, to signify the perpetuity of the kingdom. The unction of the Holy Ghost was poured on Him with an immeasureable fulness (John iii. 34).

IV. Like Solomon, Christ made His triumphal entry into the Holy City amid the joyous plaudits of the people. Great was the joy and loud were the hosannas of the people when Jesus rode in glorious but homely pomp into his own loved Jerusalem—"Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (John xii. 13). But grander and louder was the shout of victory that shook the heavens when the triumphant Messiah ascended to His court on high, and took possession of His mediatorial throne (Psa. xlvii. 5-8; xxiv. 7-10).

LESSONS:—1. *Jesus reigns—His people may therefore rejoice.* 2. *Jesus reigns—His people will therefore triumph over every foe.* 3. *Jesus reigns—the present and future interests of His people are therefore secure.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 41-49.

THE DEFEAT OF REBELLION.

I. That rebels are more intent on selfish indulgence than the public good. "As they had made an end of eating" (verse 41). Adonijah and his supporters had given themselves up to festivity; and the entertainment must have been greatly prolonged, as all the arrangements for crowning and proclaiming Solomon had been initiated and completed while his opponents were gluttonising. Rebellion originates in a feeling of intense selfishness, and when it grasps power it uses its advantage in a free, unchecked indulgence of those appetites which the force of constitutional order had restrained. How often has the conqueror of a tyrant become in turn a greater tyrant himself! He consults not the weal of the community, but the greed of his own passions. They who oppose the Lord Jesus Christ are such as serve their own bellies (Rom. xvi. 18; Phil. iii. 19). Excessive indulgence lulls the soul into a fatal security. The antediluvians, intent only on selfish indulgence, were deaf to all warnings, till the roaring waters roused them into concern; and then their frantic efforts were powerless to rescue from the suffocating waves. The dwellers in Sodom gave rein to the lowest tendencies of their nature, until the reeking stench of their abominations became intolerable, and was purged away with the fire from heaven. So shall it be at the end of the world (Luke xvii. 26-30).

II. That rebels are often surprised in the midst of fancied security. "Wherefore is this noise?" (verse 41). The blare of the same trumpet that proclaimed the coronation of Solomon startled the revellers, and revealed to the leaders of the revolt the critical position of their enterprise. What was an inspiriting note of triumph to one party was the dread signal of confusion and defeat to the other. "When sin spreads the table of riotous feasting, the end of that mirth will be heaviness. Ever after the meal is ended comes the reckoning. No doubt, at this feast, there was many a health drunk to Adonijah, many a confident boast of their prospering design, many a scorn of the despised faction of Solomon; and now for their last dish is served up astonishment and fearful expectation of a just revenge."—*Hall.* The wicked are often overtaken when they are least on their guard. It requires a sleepless vigilance to detect the swift and silent approach of justice, and superhuman forethought to ward off its inevitable vengeance; and these are qualities the wicked do not possess. The rebel is like a man who struggles to secure possession of an ocean rock because

of the fabulous treasure it is reputed to contain; and while he is gloating over his newly-found wealth, heedless of danger, he becomes suddenly aware that he is surrounded by the steadily rising sea, which, despite his shrieks of horror, enfolds him in its pitiless embrace, and sings a low, wild, mournful dirge as it entombs him in its liquid depths.

III. That rebels are compelled to listen to unwelcome tidings (verses 42-48). Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest, had probably been left behind to act as a spy upon the movements of the leading men in the city. He had seen much and heard more from reliable sources. His industry and acuteness in gathering information were amazing; and when, with breathless haste, he broke in upon the thoughtless banquetters, very different was his interpretation of the tumult which interrupted their revelry, from what Adonijah anticipated. Joab, an old campaigner, understood its significance, and trembled; but Adonijah, blinded by vanity and presumption, flattered himself that all events would be in his favour. That man is often least timorous who is in the most dangerous condition. The *order* in which Jonathan related his tidings was calculated to make a deep impression on his listeners, and to increase the consternation which they caused. *David had formally nominated Solomon as his successor:* therefore, the hopes of Adonijah were wrecked, and his attempt branded with rebellion and ingratitude. *Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah had been authorised to set Solomon on the royal mule:* therefore, these men enjoyed the confidence of the aged king, and would occupy a foremost place in the court of the youthful monarch; and the leading men who supported the revolt of Adonijah had every reason to fear for the consequences of their perfidy. *Solomon had been solemnly anointed:* therefore, the king was in earnest, and everything had been done to secure the Divine approval. *The youthful king had been brought to Jerusalem, and placed on the throne of his father:* therefore, his triumph was complete. The utmost publicity had been given to the whole transaction: it was accomplished with becoming pomp and dignity: it was welcomed by the principal officers of state: it was applauded by the people with an extravagance of joy: it was approved and confirmed by the highest authority, the dying king bowing reverently upon his bed, and pouring out his soul in gratitude to God. This intelligence filled the rebels with dismay, and convinced them of the true character and utter hopelessness of their enterprise. Awful are the tidings that will soon break upon the ear of the sinner: in the midst of his boasting and merriment the message will come that will fill his soul with a nameless terror: "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee."

IV. That rebels are doomed ere long to an inglorious defeat (verse 49). The followers of Adonijah were stricken with fear, their faces paled, their hearts grew chill, their courage failed them, their sport was spoiled, and, their eyes being opened, they saw the wicked daring of their conduct. They were now liable to be punished as rebels. They took to flight, and thus sought to escape the consequence of their rash attempt. "They were afraid, and rose up and went every man his way." Such is the fate of all unrighteous rebellion against God or man. Rebellion has in it no element of permanency. It clutches at a temporary advantage, while it outrages and tramples on eternal principles. It must sooner or later suffer defeat—defeat the most humiliating and disastrous. It is a bubble, inflated with pride and glittering with the many-coloured tints of vanity, but melting away before the gossamer thread stretched across its pathway. It is a cloud-wreath—light, gay, pretentious, aspiring; but vanishing into space before it reaches the summit of the mountain from the spongy flank of which it sprang.

LESSONS:—1. *Rebels are intensely selfish.* 2. *Rebels are ever in the greatest peril.* 3. *It is a mercy when rebels are convinced of their folly before recovery is hopeless.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 41-49. The frustration of the schemes of Adonijah. 1. The intelligence he obtains. 2. The effect produced by this intelligence. To an evil conscience (Joab) the trumpets which announce victory and joy are judgment trumpets which sound forth—Thou art weighed, and found wanting. The same message in which David expresses himself, Blessed be, &c. (v. 48), works terror and alarm in Adonijah and his party. So still ever sounds the "good message," that the true Prince of Peace (Christ) has won the victory, and is seated at the right hand of God, which to some is for thanksgiving and praise, so that they support themselves upon it; but to others it is a stone of stumbling, so that they fall and are confounded (Isa. viii. 14; Luke ii. 34).—*Lange.*

Verse 42. **A truthful messenger**—1. Is at great pains to ascertain the truth. 2. Has a good reputation to maintain. "Thou art a valiant man." 3. Is unmoved by flattery. "Come in; thou bringest good tidings." 4. Swerves not from the truth because it is unpleasant. 5. Is earnest and faithful in giving prominence to the main features of his message. 6. Is often the means of arresting mischief before it has gone too far.

Verse 48. **The joy of aged and dying saints in leaving their descendants prosperous, peaceful, and pious.** David blessed God that He had given him a worthy successor. He had great satisfaction in Solomon's character as one eminently wise and good, in whom the Israelites would heartily acquiesce and rejoice, and under whose government the kingdom would be peaceful, prosperous, and happy. Amidst all the languor of nature, David's heart rejoiced in this happy settlement, and he ascribes the praise to that God from whom promotion cometh. Observe—

I. That the prospect of leaving their families in prosperous and peaceful circumstances and in the service of God is a matter of great joy to aged and dying saints. 1. *It is a pleasure to an aged and dying saint to leave his family in prosperous circumstances.* It is the character of a good man that he is not a lover of this world, nor anxiously solicitous about future events. Nevertheless, he considers himself as obliged by the laws of nature, reason, and the gospel, to provide for those of his own house; not only to furnish them with the necessaries of life while he liveth, but lay up for them such a share of its good things as he can, consistent with their present support and comfort, and the other demands which his great Lord hath upon him. He is particularly pleased and thankful that what he leaves is the fruit of his honest industry; that he has no ill-gotten money among his substance, to bring a curse upon it; and that his family will be likely to have the blessing of God with what he leaves them. 2. *It is a greater pleasure to leave his descendants in unity and love.* David had seen and felt much of the fatal mischiefs of discord in his own family; but he hoped that the settlement of so wise and benevolent a prince as Solomon on the throne would establish and secure its peace. Contentions and quarrels, between whomsoever they happen, are grievous to all the sons of peace, dishonourable to religion, and injurious to its power; but between those of the same stock and family they are most shameful and pernicious. The celebrated Philip de Mornay (Lord Plessis) said, with an air of cheerfulness, just before his death: "I am arrived at the height of comfort, since I die with the assurance of leaving peace among my children." 3. *It is his greatest joy to leave his descendants in the way of holiness, and zealous for the support of religion.* Next to the good hope of his own salvation, there is nothing can give the heart of a pious parent higher delight than such a prospect as this. He can adopt the dying words of Joseph to his brethren

and posterity: "I die; but God will surely visit you, and bring you to the land which He hath promised" (Gen. l. 24).

II. The reasons why such a prospect gives so much joy to aged and dying saints. 1. *This joy arises in part from their natural love to their descendants.* God hath implanted in all creatures a strong affection to their offspring, in order that they may preserve and sustain them till they are capable of providing for themselves. This natural instinct or affection is, in good men, sanctified by religion. Thus their children become dear to them by a stronger and more engaging tie than that of nature, even their common relation to God as their Father and Friend, and to Jesus as their Redeemer and Saviour. 2. *The concern aged saints feel for the honour of God and for the continuance and spread of religion increases this joy.* It is the joy of the good man to think that though he is dying, religion is not dying with him: that that will survive, and continue in the town and neighbourhood to which he is related, and, especially, in his own family. The more the dying saint loves God and His ways, the more he rejoices there are those rising up in his stead who will have the same love and care, and be the support of religion when he is laid in the dust. 3. *But the principal ground of joy of the aged and dying saint is the prospect of meeting his pious descendants again in the heavenly world.* The separation from loved ones is but short; and it is with unspeakable joy the dying saint looks around on his pious, dutiful children when he thinks that he shall soon meet them again in the presence of Christ, with their graces infinitely improved and all their imperfections done away.

Inferences. 1. *It should be the earnest desire and diligent care of all parents that they may have this joy.* The pious Dr. Annesty, when one of his friends hinted to him that his charity was too great considering the number of his children, answered: "You quite mistake the matter: I am laying up portions for my children." 2. *Aged saints who have this joy ought to be very thankful.* A strong obligation is laid upon them to employ their remaining time and strength in endeavouring to promote higher degrees of piety, zeal, and usefulness in those who shall come after them. 3. *It is the duty of young persons to fulfil their parents' joy.* It is mentioned, as an amiable part of the character of the judicious Hooker, that he used to say: "If I had no other reason and motive for being religious, I would strive earnestly to be so for the sake of my aged mother, that I may requite her care of me, and cause the widow's heart to sing for joy."—*Orton.*

Verse 49. The inconstancy of wicked accomplices. 1. *That the wicked vow undying friendship to each other when the lower instincts of their nature are gratified.* When Adonijah prepared a feast he had troops of friends. 2. *That the first tidings of calamity fill the wicked with fear.* The sinner is essentially a coward. Having no righteous principle to sustain him, he is powerless in the day of adversity. 3. *That the wicked, on the slightest alarm, seek safety in ignoble flight.* When the message of misfortune was brought to Adonijah, all his professed adherents, even the astute Joab, forsook him (Eccles. vi. 10-12).

—"And went every man his way." Individual responsibility—1. Cannot be merged in the actions of the crowd. 2. Is vividly impressed upon the conscience in the hour of misfortune. 3. Recognises the desert of punishment for wrong-doing. 4. Anxiously strives to escape impending vengeance.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 50-53.

Royal Clemency.

I. Here we have royal clemency earnestly and humbly sought (verses 50, 51). The reckless adventurer is liable to great and sudden changes: he may be a monarch in the morning, and a beggar before night. He who issues commands and pardons to others may himself have to sue for mercy. Adonijah confesses his crime, acknowledges the kingship of Solomon, declares his subjection, and seeks forgiveness. The fear of death, the sense of sin, and the alarming consequences it involves, the yearning of the soul to be reconciled to the Being whom we have offended, lend unutterable pathos and fervency to our prayers. The deepest want of the soul, and that which is expressed in its most thrilling cry, is mercy. The sincere penitent seeks not in vain (Isaiah lv 6, 7). Forgiveness is a blessing worthy of the most diligent search.

II. Here we have royal clemency moved by the distress of the vanquished. Adonijah, who a few hours ago was the proudest and gayest in Judah, elevated to the pinnacle of confident success (verses 5, 42), was now a crushed and disappointed man. He fears the vengeance of his successful brother, flies to the altar for safety, and becomes a trembling suppliant for mercy. It may be, Adonijah had before slighted the religious services of the altar; but, as with many others, in the time of distress it is the first place to which he runs. Whatever drives the sinner to the mercy-seat is an unspeakable blessing. Solomon hears of Adonijah's penitence and terror; he remembers he is his brother; that this was perhaps his first offence; that he will be more serviceable as a peaceful subject than as a restless agitator of rebellion; and the heart of the young prince is moved to clemency. The victor can afford to be generous, and the most fitting exercise of newly-acquired power is to show mercy. So God hears the cry of distress—the sad monotone of woe, ever surging up from the throbbing sea of human experience. He beholds, too, the voiceless anguish under which thousands writhe; and His great heart melts with pity, and His arm is outstretched to save.

III. Here we have the conditions on which royal clemency is exercised (verse 52). Indiscriminate lenity is fatal to good government. The continuance of mercy is conditioned on the moral conduct of the pardoned. Adonijah is put on his good behaviour. If he show himself a worthy man [Hebrew, *a son of valour*], controlling himself and quietly submitting to the reigning power, he shall remain secure and unmolested; but if he hatches a new treason, or otherwise misconducts himself, his life is imperilled. Let not the veteran in wickedness delude himself with the belief that he will go unpunished, or that in the boundlessness of the Divine goodness his sins will be overlooked. The Righteousness that provides an outflow of the richest mercy is also inflexibly rigorous in inflicting deserved vengeance (Ecclesiastes xii. 14; Romans i. 18; 2 Corinthians v. 10). The moral character we form on earth will be the basis of our condition and destiny in the future world: and that character will be inevitably developed, or blasted, according to the degree in which we gain or forfeit the clemency and approbation of God.

IV. Here we have royal clemency generously declared. "So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar; and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house" (verse 53). His crime is pardoned, his life is spared, and he is reinstated in his position and inheritance. Considering the custom of Eastern monarchies, the marvel is that Adonijah was so generously

dealt with. In some Oriental countries, not only are pretenders almost always punished with death, but it has often been the custom for each king, upon his accession, to put to death all his brothers as mere possible pretenders. In Turkey this custom continued into the present century. Pardon brings no comfort to the stricken penitent unless it is distinctly declared and consciously realized. God delighteth in mercy and in assuring the trembling but believing soul of the joy-creating fact of forgiveness. To forgive is the most difficult and the most God-like; it is here that the flood-tide of generosity registers its highest summit.

V. Here we have royal clemency gratefully acknowledged. "And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon" (verse 53). Subdued more by the generous spirit of his victorious brother than by the failure of his own boasted enterprize, Adonijah renders thankful homage at once to the clemency and the dignity of the king. Man forgets the gracious power that delivers him from misery far more quickly than the pungency of the misery itself when endured. Of the ten lepers cleansed, only one returned to give thanks to the Great Healer. To be grateful is the least that man can do, and it is a grace of which he shows the least. Life should be one glad expression of thankfulness and humble obedience.

LESSONS:—1. *Power loses none of its dignity or efficiency by showing mercy.* 2. *To be forgiven increases the obligation to live uprightly.* 3. *The pardon earnestly sought should be humbly and gratefully acknowledged.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 50. The altar, the refuge for the guilty. 1. It is the place of sacrifice and atonement. 2. It is the symbol of reconciliation. 3. It is the scene of divine manifestations. 4. It is suggestive of worship. 5. It is the sanctuary of the distressed in all ages.

Verse 52. Destiny decided by moral character. 1. Man is a free moral agent. 2. He is therefore responsible for his beliefs, words, and actions. 3. Every provision has been made to aid man in the right conduct of life. 4. The position of man in the future is decided by the character and results of his present life. 5. To abuse religious privileges entails unutterable disaster.

Verse 53. "Go to thine house." The uncertainty of earthly greatness. 1. It is possible to be one day in affluence, the next a pauper. 2. True greatness is permanent only when it rests on a moral basis. 3. It is a bitter experience to descend from a proud popularity to obscurity.

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF A BRILLIANT REIGN.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 3. **Keep the charge of Jehovah**—*i.e.*, preserve the Theocracy, maintain the piety and dignity becoming the Hebrew monarch, who rules by Divine right, and is entrusted with the representation and vindication of the Divine laws. **Keep his statutes,** חֻקֹּת—the prescriptions of the law. **Commandments,** מִצְוֹת, the expressions of the Divine will. **Judgments**—מִשְׁפָּטִים objective sentences and ordinances, the violation of which involves punishment. **Testimonies**—עֵדוֹת solemn declarations of God's will against sin (Keil). **That thou mayst prosper**—Not so much "have good fortune"

(Gesenius, De Wette), but be skilful, carry yourself wisely, as he surely will do who acts harmoniously with the Divine "statutes, commandments," &c., verse 4. The Vatican Sept. omits "*concerning me*," and "*with all their soul*." Not fail thee a man: assures "not a completely unbroken succession, but only the opposite of a break for ever" (Hengstenberg); *lit.* "there shall not be cut off from thee a man on the throne;" *i.e.*, thy posterity shall hold the throne in perpetuity: the royal house of David became imperishable in "great David's greater Son." Verse 5. Shed the blood of war in peace; *i.e.*, murderously slew the inoffensive; shed, in peace, blood which should only flow in war. Put the blood of war on his girdle and in his shoes—The "girdle" was the military band, and to which his sword was attached, worn by a warrior, suggestive, therefore, of his rank; while his "shoes" suggest his marching equipment; and these insignia of his office and dignity he soiled with murder! (comp. Lange). Verse 6. Do according to thy wisdom—At fitting time, and in fitting manner, mark his crimes with abhorrence, and requite his guilty deeds. Verse 7. Eat at thy table, for so they came to me," *i.e.*, they did me kindness in entertaining me. Verse 8. Bahurim—A village beyond Olivet, five and a quarter miles distant from Jerusalem. A grievous curse—Not merely cursed me, but קְלָלָה נִמְרֶצֶת a grievous, violent curse (as in Micah ii. 10, "*sore* destruction"); heinous, dreadful. Such punishment of Shimei was not vindictiveness on David's part, but a vindication of the Divine justice against a ribald impiety. Verse 10. Buried in the city of David—A tomb probably prepared by the king before he died, and afterwards marked with great veneration, even in the time of Christ. Verse 13. Comest thou peaceably?—After recent events, there was reason to suspect his design. Verse 15. The kingdom is turned about—He prudently thus evades the charge on Bathsheba of having herself been accessory to this issue. Verse 16. Deny me not; *lit.*, turn not away my face. Verse 18. Well, I will speak for thee—She saw not the cunning of Adonijah, and might have thought this gratification would appease his disappointment. Verse 22. Ask for him the kingdom also—Solomon saw his crafty aim. The wives and concubines of a deceased king became the property of his successor to the throne (2 Sam. xii. 8); hence the possession of Abishag would have given to Adonijah an additional apparent right to the kingdom; it was treason, therefore, for him, a subject, to claim a member of the royal harem as his wife; and Solomon recognised it as one step towards the seizure of the crown, or as a scheme by which Adonijah sought to found a rival dynasty. Hence the summary justice (verse 25), and hence, too, the religious oath (verse 23), for the royal line of David might not be imperilled by intrigue. Verse 26. Not at this time put thee to death—It did not contain a threat that what was now deferred would be executed at a later date; the sentence would depend on Abiathar's future conduct. Verse 30. Nay, but I will die here—A defiance of the king's message, thinking that Solomon dared not order his execution there. But Joab had placed himself outside the protection of the altar (Exod. xxi. 14; Deut. xix. 11-13). Verse 37. Thy blood shall be upon thine own head—The legal form of the sentence of death (Lev. x. 9, 11, 12, etc.). Verse 38. Dwelt in Jerusalem many days; וַיָּמִים רַבִּים. Verse 42. The word that I have heard is good. Pointed sometimes thus,—"The word is good; I have heard." Verse 46. So the king commanded—that he died—This was not merciless rigour. Shimei had committed perjury, had acted deceitfully and independently—not petitioning Solomon for leave; and having added to high treason (verse 44) this crime of violating his oath, though on keeping it his life hung, retribution was imperative. Kingdom was established בְּיַד, in or by the hand, *i.e.*, in the possession of Solomon, or by his administration.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-4.

Obedience the Pathway of Blessing.

I. That the supreme standard of obedience is the Divine will (verse 3) Will expresses itself in significant actions, or in positive commands. The *statutes* are the prescriptions of the law, so far as its obedience is connected with definite rules and usages: the *commandments*, as the expression of the Divine will, which is to be fulfilled: the *judgments*, as the objective sentences and ordinances, the violation of which draws punishment after it: the *testimonies*, as solemn declarations of the will of God against sin. All these statutes, commandments, judgments, and testimonies are found in the law of Moses, to obey which David binds his son.—*Keil.* According to Patrick, the "statutes"

are explained as the positive ordinances of the law, *e.g.*, the command not to sow two seeds of different kinds together: the "commandments" as the moral precepts, not to steal, &c.: the "judgments" as the laws belonging to civil government: and the "testimonies" as the laws directing the commemoration of certain events (compare Psalm xix. 7-8): the Written Word is the latest declaration of the Divine will, and the supreme rule by which obedience must be regulated.

II. That obedience consists in the strict conformity of the whole life to the Divine will. This implies—1. *Knowledge.* There is to be a personal acquaintance with the will of God "as it is written in the law of Moses" (verse 3), and in the books of Revelation and of nature. The Divine Word has been the subject of pious instruction from sire to son, through succeeding generations. As in the case of David, it has often constituted the last solemn charge of a dying father. It has been illustrated in the lives of the good, and enforced by the impressive teachings of many a wondrous providence. There has been line upon line and precept upon precept. Every opportunity has been afforded for becoming acquainted with the Divine will, so that ignorance thereof is inexcusable and blameworthy. 2. *Circumspection.* "And keep the charge of the Lord thy God" (verse 3). In general, this means to take care of God, His person, His will, His rights. A trust of tremendous significance is committed to us: the honour of Jehovah is in our hands. It is only by an exact obedience that we can discharge the duties of our sacred trust: and to do this involves incessant thought, anxious care, and sleepless vigilance. There is reference to the charge given to all kings in Deuteronomy xvii. 18-20. The monarch is amenable to the same moral law as his meanest subject. If obedience is careless and defective in the higher social circles, a similar spirit will soon infect the lower, and the moral integrity of the nation be seriously damaged. "The least deviation in the greatest and highest orb is both most sensible and most dangerous." Keep the charge—as the sentinel the post of danger, as the physician in the critical stage of disease, as the stern and faithful guardian of untold treasure.

III. That obedience should be resolute and manly. "Be thou strong, therefore, and shew thyself a man" (verse 2). Solomon's youth clearly constituted one of the chief difficulties of his position. His exact age at his accession is uncertain. Eupolemus made him twelve. According to Josephus he was fourteen, but this may be no more than a deduction from David's words, "Solomon, my son, is young and tender" (1 Chron. xxii. 5), and from Solomon's own declaration (1 Kings iii. 7), "I am but a little child." Moderns generally have supposed that he was about twenty, which is probably an over rather than an under estimate. For a youth of nineteen or twenty, known to be of a pacific disposition (1 Chron. xxii. 9), to have rule over the warlike and turbulent Hebrew nation, with a strong party opposed to him, and brothers of full age ready to lead it, was evidently a most difficult task. Hence he is exhorted, though in years a boy, to show himself in spirit a man.—*Speaker's Comm.* It is not always easy to obey. It demands a firm, bold, intrepid spirit to dare to do the right, when by doing so it bears painfully upon those we love. Obedience to the highest law sacrifices all lower considerations, at whatever cost of personal feeling. The obedient man is *the true man*—the bravest and the best. They who would be faithful to God have need of courage.

IV. That obedience is the pathway of blessing. 1. *It insures the fulfilment of Divine promises.* "That the Lord may continue his word which he spake" (verse 4). The promises of God are conditional, "which is as an oar in a boat, or stern of a ship, and turneth the promise another way." The original promise

to David that Messiah should come out of his loins was apparently absolute and unconditional (2 Sam. vii. 11-17); but the promise as to his children occupying the throne of Israel was conditioned on their obedience (Psalm cxxxii. 12). David reminds Solomon of this in order to impress upon him a powerful motive to continued fidelity. We never lose the blessedness of the promise till we first neglect the precept. 2. *It confers blessing on every undertaking.* "That thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself" (verse 3). To infringe law in any department brings confusion and suffering; obedience is not only the way of safety, but of success. The man whose ways please God shall not lack any manner of thing that is good. Abraham, when at the call of Jehovah he stepped into the region of the untried and unknown, little dreamt of the wealth of blessing that was destined to rest upon him and his posterity as the reward of his faith and obedience. There is no peace so calm and abiding as that which flows from conscious rectitude. "That happiness is built on sand or ice which is raised upon any other foundation besides virtue." Ill-gotten prosperity is transient and full of bitterness. 3. *It leads to the highest honour.* "There shall not fail thee a man on the throne of Israel" (verse 4). This promise, confirmed by the Lord himself to Solomon on his prayer at the consecration of the temple (viii. 25), which was repeated by the prophet Jeremiah (xxxiii. 17) at the time of the greatest humiliation of the royal house of David, for the strengthening and consolation of the faithful, found its full realization in Christ, the greatest descendant of David, whose dominion will endure as long as the sun and moon stand (Psalm lxxii.) Fidelity in a lower sphere is an excellent preparation for the honours and duties of a higher. The career of the obedient is like a river, small and unnoticed in its beginning, but gathering volume, momentum, and majesty in its expanding flow. Obedience is, to quote the language of Carlyle, "an everlasting lode-star, that beams the brighter in the heavens, the darker here on earth grows the night around."

LESSONS:—1. *Obedience is the earliest and most difficult lesson to learn.* 2. *It is often richest in blessing when it is most difficult to practise.* 3. *We are called to its exercise by the most solemn considerations.*

DAVID'S DYING CHARGE TO SOLOMON.

The scene before us is solemnly impressive. The youth that had slain a giant is now, after a most eventful life, about to fall before a mightier arm than that of Goliath; the friend that had wept over his beloved Jonathan, is now going the way of all the earth; the monarch who had exclaimed over the remains of a child, still lovely in death, "I shall go to him, but he cannot return to me," is now at the end of his last stage, and about to mingle his ashes with the departed. We will draw near, and hear his last words of parental tenderness and dying counsel to his royal son and successor. "Be thou strong, and show thyself a man." If the king of Israel needed strength, and was required to show himself a man in the government of his kingdom, no less necessary, nay—onerous as the duties and cares of a sovereign might be—far greater, is the courage which the vigorous maintenance of our moral and religious principles demands.

I. It behoves us to be strong, and quit ourselves as men, as it respects the truth and doctrines of the Gospel. If on any question manliness of character is demanded, it is on this. If the Scriptures are a revelation of God's will to man, receive them as such, and obey them accordingly. How many are there who, manly, perhaps, in many things besides, are here most irresolute, timid,

hesitating, or double-minded. It is not acting as a man to own the Bible to be true, and at the same time treat it as if it were a fiction, a fable, a falsehood Sustained by the clearest evidence, and published to the world by the highest authority, the Word of God is worthy of all confidence. It is no doubtful question whether the Lord Jesus was sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world, nor what is the substance of His doctrine and teaching. Whatever He has expounded, it is for us, with a single, simple heart, to follow; to take the truth as He left it; to grasp it firmly as our life, and hold it with the same tenacity as a sinking man would hold the hand that was stretched forth to save him from the gurgling vortex. If we truly believe that we possess the treasure of a true revelation from God, then it is manly to espouse, to defend, to diffuse it for its own inestimable value, for the honour of Him from whom it comes, for the purity, peace, and safety of our own souls, and for its power to regenerate and bless the world.

II. To carry out the admonition is to shrink from no duty and no sacrifice which it may require. It is not the way of the *world*, even where the Christian religion is professed, to render obedience to the Divine commands. A kind of respectful treatment of the Word of God—nothing bold, nothing decided—is all that it will render; and the love and fear of the world will prompt us to do no more. A still stronger persuasion of the *flesh* speaks from within. It is sloth, it is selfishness, it is the predominance of some master passion, that governs the irreligious mind, and places men in rebellion against the will of God and the dearest interests of the soul. And then the *Evil Spirit*, the great tempter, the subtle adversary of man, will suggest all discontented and rebellious thoughts. Thus beset, multitudes, instead of quitting themselves like men and resisting the devil, readily yield. Does he show himself a man who yields to every temptation to neglect the house of God on the Sabbath, and to follow the allurements of pleasure? Does that youth show a manliness of mind who consents to the enticements of sinners, and surrenders himself to companionship with those whose house is the way to hell? Does that misguided and miserable creature show himself a man who, for the sake of indulging the lowest and worse than brutal propensities of his nature, will beggar his wife, starve his children, cover himself with rags, and make his home the scene of poverty, strife, and every hateful and disgusting passion? Ought we not to carry with us as Christians the same resolute and decided temper, the same open and obvious manliness in all matters that refer to eternity, as we do to those which are limited to time? In a word, to serve God is to show the same spirit towards Him which every one of us, who has the heart of a man, would show in defence of the health, the welfare, the happiness, and the life of the members of his own family.

III. To carry out the admonition, we must be bold and persevering in the work of God, till He shall relieve us from all further service. It is manly to begin well, but it is most unmanly to forsake or negligently execute a task once begun. There is a mighty class of inducements to instability in religion, such as are not brought to operate upon the mind in any other sphere of action. Here, as everywhere, success and satisfaction are the recompense, not of half deeds, but of manly, hearty energy, industry, and perseverance. Who is sufficient for these things? No one of himself; but He who gives us the command will not fail us if we rely upon Him for its fulfilment. When He bids us be strong, He is ready to give us power to obey. Heaven is the prize, every effort shall have its reward. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who have finished their manly course, and reached the crown. They invite us onward. Let us not fear the troubles that beset the way, but be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Arise, for the work is great, the time is short, but the prize is eternal.—*T. W. Hamilton, D.D.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 2. "I go the way of all the earth." Death a journey. 1. Silent and mysterious in its commencement. 2. Interminable in its pathway. 3. A journey on which all must enter. 4. Demands diligent and serious preparation. 5. Is a period of sad farewells and solemn counsels.

David lives to see a wise son warm in his seat; and now he that yielded to succession yields to nature. Many good counsels had David given his heir; now he sums them up in his end. Dying words are wont to be weightiest; the soul when it is entering into glory breathes nothing but divine: "I go the way of all the earth." How well is that princely heart content to subscribe to the conditions of human mortality, as one that knew sovereignty doth not reach to the affairs of nature! Though a king, he neither expects nor desires an immunity from dissolution, making no account to go in any other than the common tract to the universal home of mankind, the house of age. Whither should earth, but to earth? And why should we grudge to do that which all do?—*Bishop Hall.*

"Be thou strong, therefore, and shew thyself a man." Be firm, and be a man! 1. What is requisite to be one? 2. How shall one become one? 3. Of what use? (Heb. xiii. 9; 1 Cor. xv. 5-8; xvi. 13.)—*Lange.*

Even when David's spirit was going out, he puts spirit into his son; age puts life into youth, and the dying animates the vigorous. He had well found that strength was necessary to government, that he had need to be no less than a man that should rule over men. A weak man may obey, none but the strong can govern.—*Bishop Hall.*

Verse 3. The last and best will of a father to his son. 1. Trust in God's protection of yourself and all whom God has confided to your care. 2. Walk in His ways; let Him lead and guide you; He will do it well (Prov. xxiii. 26; Psalm xxxv. 5). 3. Keep His ways and ordinances (Eccles. xii. 13; Psalm i. 1-6; Tob. iv. 6). God-fearing parents are more anxious about their children keeping close to God and His word than about leaving them temporal goods.—*Lange.*

Graceless courage were but the whetstone of tyranny. The best legacy that David bequeaths to his heir is the care of piety. Himself had felt the sweetness of a good conscience, and now he commands it to his successor. If there be anything that, in our desires of the prosperous condition of our children, takes place of goodness, our hearts are not upright. Here was the father of a king, charging the king's son to keep the statutes of the King of kings; as one that knew greatness could neither exempt from obedience, nor privilege sin.—*Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 5-9.

The Terrible Pertinacity of Revenge.

It is unfair to judge Old Testament characters according to the standard of New Testament morality. Viewed in the light of the religious ideas of the nineteenth century, the temper and conduct of David on his death-bed are irreconcileable with the spirit and genius of Christianity. But the religious era of David was initial and imperfect in its development; and it is no marvel if we detect serious blemishes alongside what is best in its experimental life. Besides, it should not be overlooked that in the instance before us David spoke not as a private individual, but as a theocratic king, uttering the decrees of the righteous vengeance of Heaven against gross wrong-doing. We may regard the whole passage as illustrative of *the terrible pertinacity of revenge.*

I. That a spirit of revenge is difficult to suppress. 1. *It may obtrude*

itself amid the solemnities of the dying hour. When the soul is about to quit its frail, worn tenement, and is pluming its wings to soar into the invisible and eternal, it is desirable that its latest thoughts on earth should savour of amity, peace, and concord, and that its words should be free from bitterness and enmity. But such is the subtle, pertinacious character of revenge, that it clings to the soul for years, and disturbs the repose of the dying pillow. It is the dark, grim shadow of man's better self, ever present, consciously or unconsciously, and which sometimes never vanishes but into the deeper shadow of the grave. 2. *It mars a character otherwise noble and generous.* There was much in the character of David of moral beauty, of noble impulse, and lofty aspiration. In the complexity of its elements, passion, tenderness, generosity, fierceness—the soldier, the shepherd, the poet, the statesman, the priest, the prophet, the king, the romantic friend, the chivalrous leader, the devoted father—there is no character of the Old Testament at all to be compared to it. Jacob comes nearest in the variety of elements included within it. But "David's character stands at a higher point of the sacred history, and represents the Jewish people just at the moment of their transition from the lofty virtues of the older system to the fuller civilization and cultivation of the later. In this manner he becomes naturally, if one may so say, the likeness or portrait of the last and grandest development of the nation and of the monarchy in the person and period of the Messiah." Pity it is that a character of qualities so fine and varied should be blurred by the dark, unsightly blot of revenge! making every allowance for David as representing in his last utterances the intentions of avenging Heaven. Revenge threatens the destruction of every virtue.

II. That a spirit of revenge retains a vivid recollection of past injuries. 1. *The particular occasions of past injuries are retentively remembered* (verses 5, 8.) Joab's chief offence against David, besides his murder of Abner and Amasa, was, no doubt, his killing Absalom (2 Sam. xviii. 14), despite the king's orders to the contrary. Another serious crime was his support of the treasonable attempt of Adonijah. But, besides these, he seems to have offended David by a number of little acts. He was a constant thorn in his side. He treated him with scant respect, taking important steps without his orders (2 Sam. iii. 26), remonstrating with him roughly and rudely (*ib.* verses 24, 25), almost betraying his secrets (*ib.* xi. verses 19-21), and where he disliked the orders given him, disobeying them (1 Chron. xxi. 6). David allowed his ascendancy, but he chafed against it, finding "this son of Zeruiah" in particular, "too hard" for him (2 Sam. iii. 39). Shimei's cursing was all the more grievous because David was in distress at the time (2 Sam. xvi.); and the Jews say the insult was all the greater because Shimei upbraided him with his descent from Ruth, the Moabitess. The hatred and virulence of the curse indicated that the Benjamites resented the loss of royalty in their tribe, even in the palmiest days of David's monarchy. Revenge notes every minute detail of the injury inflicted, broods over it in secret, and watches for the moment of retaliation; its memory is infallible, its hatred intense, its patience stern and unwearying, and its sting venomous and cruel. 2. *The character of past injuries modifies the character of the revenge they provoke.* The injuries in this case were of the gravest kind—cursing and murder. Sometimes the revenge is more terrible than the offence. In other instances the acts are so flagrant and sinful that to cherish and execute revenge simply amounts to the infliction of the righteous punishment of outraged justice. Magistrates are the avengers of the blood of those of whom they have charge. There are some sins which it would be a greater sin to allow to go unnoticed and unrequited. The murderer and blasphemer were punishable with death (Lev. xxiv. 14; Exod. xxii. 27; 2 Sam. xvi. 9; *ib.* xix. 22). 3. *Great forbearance may be shown before revenge is gratified* (verse 8). Shimei had

seen and confessed his sin, and obtained a reprieve, at least during David's lifetime (2 Sam. xix. 16-23). But his offence was of such a character, and his turbulent, malicious temper so well known, that Solomon was warned not to let slip the opportunity which any new offence offered of inflicting the punishment he deserved. The spirit of revenge may be for a while restrained by the prevalence of a more generous feeling, from motives of policy, or in order to choose the best time for its gratification; but, sooner or later, the stroke will fall. For a justification of David's conduct in committing to judgment a man whom he had forgiven, see *Keil* on verses 8 and 9, with foot note.

III. That a spirit of revenge is terribly pertinacious in its demands (verses 6-9). 1. *It surrenders its victims to the extreme penalties of justice.* "Hold him not guiltless,"—do not treat him as an innocent man; but punish him as in thy wisdom may seem best. Not at once; but when the next delinquency is committed, hesitate not to punish with the utmost severity. "So that deferring payment is no breach of bond: there will come a time wherein the Lord will have a full blow at the impenitent person, be the pretences of impunity what they will."—*Trapp.* The hoary head of both must be brought to the grave with blood, else David's head could not be brought to his grave in peace. Due punishment of malefactors is the debt of authority: if that holy king has run into arrearages, yet, as one that hates and fears to break the bank, he gives orders to his paymaster, it shall be defrayed, if not by him, yet for him.—*Bishop Hall.* Revenge may slumber for years; but when it is once roused, terrible is the havoc which it works. It burns with irresistible fierceness. It exacts the uttermost farthing of the penalty. 2. *The aged are allowed no exemption from its severest punishments.* Grey hairs, if found in the way of righteousness, are a crown of glory (Prov. xvi. 31), adorned with which man may go the way of all flesh in peace and comfort; but an old sinner, whom even grey hairs have not brought to repentance, goes down to the grave without solace or peace. Age in itself is no protection from justice. The longer man continues in sin, the more fearful will be his punishment (Isa. lxv. 20). A life of wasted opportunities, abused privileges, and unrepented sins will bring an old age of suffering and dishonour.

IV. That a spirit of revenge is often relieved by the exhibition of an opposite spirit of kindness and liberality. "But shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai" (verse 7). A good deed will not go unrewarded. Even successions of generations fare better for one good parent (Prov. xxvii. 10). The children of Barzillai inherit the fruits of their father's timely hospitality (2 Sam. xvii. 27-29). Generous natures are never ungrateful. Agesilaus, king of Sparta, was always very grateful for any courtesies he received, and used to say that it was not only an unjust thing not to be thankful, but if a man did not return greater kindness than he received. The honour of eating at the royal table is a custom thoroughly oriental, and has prevailed in all ages. How much more bountiful is the Father of Mercies in the remuneration of our poor, unworthy services! The heart that is susceptible of the bitterest revenge is often most lavish in affection and generosity.

LESSONS:—1. *Revenge is strangely out of place on a death-bed.* 2. *The predominance of the Christian spirit destroys revenge.* 3. *To forgive an injury is more noble than to retaliate.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 8, 9.

THE SINS OF GODLY MEN.

A man of God retains to the last the bias of nature with which his Maker endowed him at the first. Christianity does not reduce men to one dead level;

it rather brings out in greater relief those parts of our character which are in harmony with its principles, while tending to tone down others with which it has no affinity. If the good man in the present age is so misunderstood, and his actions so unmercifully criticised, what little chance is there of the characters of men in past times being rightly appreciated and justly dealt with? The Almighty is ever the same; but the peoples of every age, in every land, differ from their sires. Where once the stalwart Roman stood, there now the effeminate Italian basks in languid ease. The bandit lurks where erst the philosophic Greek discoursed. All this God recollects, if we forget, and assuredly will judge men as well from that outside them, as from that within their hearts. There are three ways in which David may have been influenced in giving this dying injunction to his son:—

1. As the agent, unconscious or otherwise, of Divine justice. We cannot conceive this measure as being the consummation of a Divine purpose, it had apparently so much about it of human plan. The Almighty's power, when exerted in support of justice, has always been certain and direct in its action, without any reference to contingencies. With God it is all justice or all mercy: no half measures. How different from man's punishment is this! The very manner of Shimei's death is the greatest argument against it having been ordained by God (verse 36-46). Even David and his son were ashamed of it; and shall God be credited with what they despised? For the honour of his father's name, as well as his own, Solomon disguised his real object by laying a trap for Shimei, puerile in its meanness, and yet sufficient to attain the end desired. David's conduct in giving this dying injunction to his son may have been influenced—

II. By a conscientious desire to administer human justice according to the will of God. David, we are told, was a man of God, one after His own heart. Intimately acquainted with the Divine nature—keenly alive to heaven's requirements, and inspired most devoutly with the desire to imitate his Maker's character—he is prominently put forth as, in many respects, the model of a godly man How, then, with such clear perceptions of the Divine attributes, can we conceive of him as acting in this matter conscientiously and with cool judgment, in the full belief of the harmony of his decree with Almighty rectitude? To do so is to dishonour the unswerving uprightness of God's justice, or to depreciate David's experiences and knowledge of the Divine character. We would rather be left to our final alternative in—

III. Regarding his injunction as prompted by revenge. As a man he forgave Shimei at the time of his crime, which then should have been effaced from his memory. Heavenly justice, if not satisfied, would have taken its own way of vindicating itself, without further action on David's part. With David, as a man of God and Israel's lawgiver, we must utterly disconnect this act, and attribute it entirely to a flaw in his character, which, at the last, re-asserted its natural power in antagonism to Divine grace. Feud and retaliation have ever been the precederes of law, order, and Christianity; and even now, among some nations, one of the most sacred principles a man acknowledges is to avenge a loved one's death, or his own personal wrong, till the third and fourth generations. Undoubtedly, in David's time, this custom of revenge and retaliation was rife among the Eastern nations, along with many other practices at variance with progress and religion. Men were brought up to them, accepted them as their moral clothing, and acted up conscientiously to their injunctions. So it was with David Though a man of God, in whom He delighted, yet the customs of his time, the habits of thought of those about

him, with the silent effect of their example, had—unknown, maybe, to him—so impregnated his being as to germinate into ungodly actions at any sudden temptation or crisis, with sufficient power to sweep away for a time the tuition and principles of his heavenly life. In David's case, what mighty lessons this should teach! Here was a patriarch indeed, at the last moments of his existence succumbing to the seducing wiles and powerful instincts of his grosser nature. Men may well dread death, for then is the last great struggle between earth and heaven—nay, hell and heaven. It is Satan's last chance, and he puts forth his mighty energies in one last grand endeavour, in which the deadliest hate and fear, and every terrible passion, is at work, striving to counteract the power of his Almighty antagonist. But the Almighty knows him, and He knows us. Like David, we may be vengeful on our death-bed—our spirits may become dim, and weak, and faint; yet He knows our hearts that we are in Him, and He in us, and pardons the wanderings of our faltering footsteps as we totter to His threshold, until, as we gain the door and faintly knock, it opens wide, disclosing a scene of light, and joy, and bliss, with the inspiriting words sounding gladly in our ears—"Be of good courage, I will never leave thee or forsake thee!"—*Homilist.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 5-9. Perhaps the dying monarch is solely anxious for the security of his young successor's kingdom. Perhaps he allows old animosities to revive, and is willing to avenge himself indirectly and by deputy, though he had been withheld by certain scruples from taking vengeance in his own person. We must not expect gospel morality from the saints of the Old Testament. They were only the best men of their several ages and nations. The maxim of them of old time, whether Jews or Gentiles, was "Love your friends and hate your enemies" (Matt. v. 43), and David, perhaps, was not, in this respect, in advance of his age. It would have been more magnanimous had he, either now or previously, freely forgiven these great offenders (Joab and Shimei) their offences against himself; but it would have been a magnanimity unexampled in the previous history of the world, and which we have no right to look for in one who was the warrior king of a nation just emerging from barbarism. If David was actuated by a sense of his own wrongs in the injunctions which he gave with respect to Joab and Shimei, we cannot justify the morality of his conduct; but it ought not to occasion us any surprise or difficulty. At any rate, it is satisfactory to see that, if David did allow himself to accept the unchristian half of the maxim above quoted, and to indulge malevolent feelings against his enemies, at least he accepted equally the other half, and entertained warm feelings of affection towards his friends. His hatred pursues only the individuals who have done him wrong. His gratitude and love pass on from the doer of a kindness to the doer's children after their father's death.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 7. A noble heart does not forget what was done for him in times of trouble especially, and thinks of it even in the hour of death. The world is ungrateful. A blessing rests on deeds of faithfulness, and self-sacrificing, disinterested love; and it descends to children and children's children.—*Lange.*

A spirit of kindness—1. Has a lively appreciation of help rendered in time of need. 2. Is prompt to acknowledge its obligations. 3. Delights in showing greater kindness than it received. 4. Is an important, practical feature of the Christian spirit.

Verses 8, 9. A curse rests on those who curse the "powers" which are

God's ministers, instead of praying for them, and they are made, sooner or later, to feel the curse (1 Peter ii. 17, 6). The Lord prayed for those who cursed Him; but when they did not repent and become converted, Divine judgment came down on them. No doubt a wicked man often goes a long time unpunished for his deeds; but Divine justice does not fail to overtake him finally, ere he is aware. It required wisdom to punish: a premature, ill-judged chastisement does more harm than good.—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 10-12.

The Night of an Old Dynasty, and the Morning of the New.

The reign of David began in the midst of storm and conflict. His was a long and eventful life, teeming with romance, ever menaced with danger, and ever escaping it, and yet continually advancing to a higher pitch of greatness and power. The trumpet of rebellion had roused him from his dying couch. As one accustomed to such scenes, and well knowing how to act, he crushed the incipient attempt before it had gathered strength enough to injure his throne. It was his last struggle. From that period an era of peace was inaugurated that lasted for years. At the beginning of this season of tranquillity the dynasty of the Warrior-King closes, and is followed by the rule of the Man of Peace. This change of government suggests a few reflections.

I. That death is no respecter of person or rank. "So David slept with his fathers" (verse 10). The unpitying destroyer ravages alike the cottage and the palace. Even David, who had borne a charmed life in the fiercest battles, is at length overtaken by the enemy whose power he had seemed to defy. All the resources of a kingdom are utterly incompetent to arrest the inevitable and desolating stroke of Death. No amount of wealth can bribe him to betray his ghastly mission; no skill, however subtle, can baffle his designs; no pleadings, however pathetic, can move him to pity; no rank, however exalted, can escape his fatal visit. Silently, steadily, irresistibly, unweariedly he prosecutes his work. Like the gigantic vampire bat of Java, whose perfumed wings fan its victims into a profound sleep while it sucks the life-blood, so Death often throws a stupor over the worn-out body while knawing away its vitality: the senses are numbed, the breath rifled, the pulse stilled, and all is over—the prince and the beggar are reduced to the same level. One event happeneth to all.

II. That the greatness of the son is often built on the wise provisions of the sire. "Then sat Solomon on the throne of David his father" (verse 12). The exertions of David had made the kingdom of Israel what it was. By his conquests he greatly enlarged its territory and increased its wealth. As the crowning work of his life he set his heart upon building a temple for Jehovah; but this he was not permitted to do, though he had made extensive preparations for the undertaking. When, therefore, Solomon came to the throne, he found a kingdom thickly populated, and growing in wealth, prestige, and influence. A substantial basis was thus laid down on which the empire was raised to the height of affluence, splendour, and renown it afterwards attained. Whatever reputation Solomon might have won by his wisdom, he would never have been known to posterity as a mighty prince had he not inherited the substantial fortunes of his victorious father. The son of a great man and heir to vast possessions occupies no enviable position. He accepts a solemn responsibility—he has the prospect of a brilliant career. If he fails, his humiliation is most abject. He needs Divine help. The best guarantee of success is to possess heavenly wisdom.

III. That the progress of a nation advances notwithstanding the loss of its greatest men. "And his kingdom was established greatly" (verse 12). There is an immense power in an individual life; it impresses itself upon the nation; it moulds its policy and guides its destiny, and becomes interwoven with the texture of its character; it seems indispensable to its existence. Yet it is humbling to discover how little one is missed and how soon forgotten. Great men die; but the nations they helped to create survive and flourish. How often are we made to feel:—

> The individual is less and less,
> The world is more and more.

Individuals perish—principles never: men depart, but humanity remains. The work of one generation is a preparation for the work of another; and thus, under the controlling hand of God, nations accomplish their respective destinies:

> "There is a Power
> Unseen, that rules the illimitable world—
> That guides its motions, from the brightest star
> To the least dust of this sin-tainted world;
> While man, who madly deems himself the lord
> Of all, is nought but weakness and dependence."—*Thomson.*

LESSONS:—1. *All earthly governments are subject to change.* 2. *It is matter for gratitude to the nation when the end of one good reign is the beginning of another.* 3. *Amid the rise and fall of dynasties the Divine purpose concerning the race steadily advances.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 10, 11. The death and burial of David. 1. His death was a rest from a long and toilsome life—as a storm having spent its force sinks gently into a peaceful and prolonged slumber. Rest is sweet after bearing the burden and heat of the day for forty years. 2. He was buried among the monuments of his energy and greatness. His own city was his tomb. Kings who build palaces should not forget their tombs; a small space must shortly contain all their greatness. David's grave is a pledge that the memory of the just is blessed (Prov. x. 7; Acts ii. 29).

And now, when David hath set all things in a desired order and forwardness, he shuts up with a zealous blessing of his son Solomon and his people, and sleeps with his fathers. O, blessed soul, how quiet a possession hast thou now taken, after so many tumults, of a better crown! Thou that hast prepared all things for the house of thy God, how happily art thou now welcomed to that house of His, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!—*Hall.*

David, a type of Christ. 1. Appointed by God to his high office, and consecrated to it with the holy oil. 2. Was long opposed by violent enemies. 3. Was sustained in his heaviest trials by a large measure of Divine consolation. 4. Was supreme governor of his people. 5. Ruled in righteousness. 6. Pardoned enemies and punished the obstinately rebellious. 7. Was confirmed in the kingdom by covenant (Psalm lxxxix. 3, 4, 28, 29).—*Robinson.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 13-25.

THE DOOM OF A TREASONABLE SPIRIT.

1. That a treasonable spirit is slow to learn a lesson from past misfortunes. One would have thought that after the lamentable and disgraceful failure of his recent enterprise Adonijah would not have had the hardihood

to risk another defeat. His conduct at this time reveals his character as a restless, intriguing, ambitious man. There are some men who will not be taught. The advice of the wise is contemptuously thrown away: the most calamitous events and their obvious lessons are speedily forgotten. The love of plotting and scheming amounts in some men to a passion; they are often blinded by their own cunning, and caught in the snares they had laid for the feet of others. Envy and ambition are turbulent elements, difficult to allay, and often hurrying their victims to certain ruin.

II. That a treasonable spirit has no scruple as to the method adopted in gaining its end. 1. *It will flatter a mother's vanity.* Treason is a tortuous policy, and seeks to use others as tools to accomplish its designs. Instead of going direct to the king, Adonijah strove to influence the mother in his favour. He spoke of her son in a way to gratify the mother's heart, and to disguise the insincerity that lay beneath his words. Flattery is one of the most polished and effective weapons of the schemer. 2. *It is regardless of veracity.* "Thou knowest that all Israel set their faces on me." This was a great exaggeration. He had really no very large following (see chapter i. 39, 40, 45, 49). It was well known the Lord had chosen Solomon. Accuracy as to matters of fact never troubles the conscience of some people. The liar is never at a loss for arguments, nor very particular as to their character. Says the proverb—"It is an easy thing to find a staff to beat a dog with." 3. *It can affect a mock saintliness* "For it was his from the Lord." From such lips, this sounds very much like cant! The aim was evidently to deceive Bathsheba as to the real intention of securing her advocacy. Of all methods to attain sinister ends, the *rôle* of the religious hypocrite is the most detestable. There are some natures over whom it exerts a potent charm.

III. That a treasonable spirit is prompted by base motives (verse 17). The beauty of Abishag had made its impression on Adonijah. Blinded by sensual passion and the lust of power, he disregarded the incestuous proposal to marry his father's widow. Such an union was directly contrary to positive law (Lev. xviii. 8). The darkest designs are the offspring of the lowest motives, and an ambitious zeal for place and the public weal often covers the desire for a wider scope in the personal indulgence of sensual instincts (Psalm xxxvii. 12).

IV. A treasonable spirit knows no bounds to its ambition. Nothing short of kingship could satisfy Adonijah. His possession of Abishag was intended as a means to that end. Her eminent beauty and near relation to David would give her a powerful interest at court. In the oriental mind a monarch was so sacred, such a divinity hedged him in, that whatever was brought near to him was thenceforth separate from common use. This sacred and separate character attached especially to the royal harem. The inmates either remained widows for the rest of their lives, or became the wives of the deceased king's successor. When a monarch was murdered or dethroned, or succeeded by one whose title was doubtful, the latter alternative was almost always adopted. The Pseudo-Smerdis married all the wives of Cambyses (Herod. iii. 68); and Darius married all the wives of the Pseudo-Smerdis (*ib.* ch. 88). So David, when he succeeded Saul, had all the wives of Saul (2 Sam. xii. 8); and Absalom, when he seized the crown, by the advice of Ahitophel, went in unto his father's concubines (*ib.* xvi. 22). These are examples of what seems to have been a universal practice; and the result was such a close connection in public opinion between the title of the crown and the possession of the deceased monarch's wives, that to have granted Adonijah's request would have been the strongest encouragement to his pretensions.—*Speaker's Comm.* Woman is often courted for the sake

of the place and power to which she can introduce her suitor: the serpent addressed the woman first in order to gain the man. The ambition of a treasonable spirit is as avaricious and insatiable as it is reckless in the agencies it employs.

V. That a treasonable spirit is unexpectedly detected and exposed (verses 22, 23). Solomon at once saw through the design of Adonijah. He appears, too, to have discovered some indications of another attempt at rebellion, in which Abiathar and Joab were implicated (verse 22). He showed Bathsheba how she had been deceived by the flattery of Adonijah; and we can conceive with what alarm she would start back from the dark pitfall into which she was about unwittingly to plunge herself and son! A course of villany may go on for a long time in uninterrupted prosperity; but detection is sure to come, and the exposure will be humiliating and complete. Be sure your sin will find you out. In these days of literary enterprise, the columns of a thousand journals will exhibit your disgrace to the world in unmistakeable characters. If the mask could be torn from the face of society, what a horrid index would be presented to the festering mass of deceit, envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness which is ever heaving and spreading there! A day is coming when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and all wrongs redressed. But who can fathom the depth of that Divine patience that bears with the enormities of the wicked, and calmly waits for the hour of retribution? Better to find out and deplore our own sins before they are exposed and punished by omniscient and omnipotent justice.

VI. That a treasonable spirit meets with summary and unfaltering vengeance (verses 24, 25). Adonijah had before been pardoned, and his life spared, on condition that he acted worthily (i. 52). That condition was violated; and now, without admitting any intercession for his life, he is solemnly doomed to death, and the sentence forthwith executed. The perils of the state sometimes demand the prompt and rigorous punishment of offenders. Sin entails a life of disappointment and misery, and a death of shame and infamy. The cunning of the wicked often overreaches itself, and the plot which is intended to gain a fortune terminates in a dishonoured grave. Many a head has been lost in the attempt to seize a crown. The ruin of the enemies of Christ's kingdom is as sure as the unshakeable stability of that kingdom.

LESSONS:—1. *A treasonable spirit demoralizes man's whole nature.* 2. *The cleverest plotter is no match for the simple wisdom of uprightness.* 3. *Persistency in sin intensifies the severity of the punishment.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 13-25. Adonijah's attempt to gain the throne. 1. Wherein this attempt consisted (verses 13-18). 2. How it ended (verses 19-25). Adonijah and his faction show the truth of what is often found—namely, that revolutionary men are not discouraged by the failure of their plans, and even disgraceful defeat, but always brood over the means of attaining their ambitious views and gratifying their thirst for power. Pardon and forbearance do not change them, but generally harden and embolden them. If they do not succeed by open force, they choose deceitful ways, notwithstanding all the promises they may have given; and they feign submission until they think their opportunity has arrived. Every one to whom God has confided the government should hear the words of David to Solomon: "Be strong, therefore, and show thyself a man;" for weakness is, in this respect, sin against God and man. As to Adonijah, the

whole East knew but one punishment for such plans as he cherished—viz., death. Had his enterprise succeeded, he would doubtless have destroyed Solomon and his principal adherents, in accordance with the usual practice hitherto. Solomon, on the contrary, did not follow this custom, but showed forgiveness and generosity; in fact, he avoided all persecution of Adonijah's partisans. Only when Adonijah, contrary to his word, and notwithstanding his humble homage, again appeared as pretender to the throne, and sought to reach his end by deceit and hypocrisy, did he order the affixed punishment.—*Lange.*

Verse 18. "I will speak for thee unto the king." The Christian minister an ambassador. 1. He is divinely called and qualified. 2. He has influence with the court of heaven. 3. He pleads the cause of the needy. 4. He seeks to reconcile the rebellious to God. 5. He is appealed to for counsel by the distressed and penitent.

Verse 20. Bathsheba makes a petition against herself, and knows it not; her safety and life depend upon Solomon's reign, yet she unwittingly moves for the advancement of Adonijah. In unfit supplications we are most heard when we are repelled. Thus doth our God many times answer our prayers with merciful denials, and most blesseth us in crossing our desires.—*Bishop Hall.*

Verse 22. "Ask for him the kingdom also." For that is it he gapes after, and seeks to strengthen his cracked title by marrying the late king's concubine, who was likely grown very gracious with the great ones, and as potent at court as was once here Dame Alice Pierce, King Edward III.'s concubine, who did whatsoever she pleased.—*Trapp.*

Verse 24. "Adonijah shall be put to death this day." This day, before to-morrow, lest delay should breed danger. Who knoweth what a great-bellied day may bring forth? We are used to say—A day breaketh no square; but that is not always true. Oh, that we would be as quick in slaying our arch rebels—those predominant sins that threaten our precious souls!—*Trapp.*

Verse 25. "And he fell upon him that he died." This was another piece of the punishment of David's two great sins, the small and short pleasure whereof behold what a train and tail of calamities it draweth after it!—*Trapp.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 26, 27.

The Retribution of a Faithless Friendship.

Formerly, Abiathar had been a firm and attached friend of David, had attended him in all his wanderings when he fled from Saul, and was esteemed by the king with a special tenderness. It may be Abiathar had grown jealous of Zadok, and feared being supplanted by him; or, it may be, he was drawn into rebellion by the masterly strategy and astute opposition of the wilful and discontented Joab. He thus became, equally with Joab, involved in the guilt of treason, though a difference is made in the final judgment passed upon the two. The subject suggested by the whole passage is *the retribution of a faithless friendship.*

I. That a faithless friendship may merit the severest punishment. "For thou art worthy of death" (verse 26). Treachery on the part of one we have trusted is an act of basest cruelty; and in proportion to the intimacy enjoyed will be the mischief wrought. It is an exquisitely painful experience when, for the first time, our confidence in human nature is broken. Such an experience

has driven many into general infidelity and a reckless course of iniquity. We begin to discover the truth of the proverb—"Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth and a foot out of joint" (Prov. xxv. 19). Few men can be trusted to do all we expect, still less to do all we require. Faithless conduct is *ungrateful*. All the kindnesses of a long, fond friendship are forgotten and despised. "He who calls a man ungrateful," says Swift, "sums up all the evil a man can be guilty of." Such conduct entails unspeakable *suffering*. To the pang of disappointment is added a series of disasters. No one sin is alone; it is the cause of many others: it is like the letting out of waters. Such conduct will meet with severe *punishment*. The unfaithful friend often suffers more than his victim. Conscience will speak, and its every tone is full of torture. The most callous will be goaded into agony by the stings of a retributive remorse.

II. That the severity of retribution is often moderated by the recollection of acts of fidelity in the past. 1. *Respect is had to the religious office and conduct of God's ministers.* "Because thou barest the ark of the Lord God" (verse 26). Whatever we do for God in sincerity and truth will not be forgotten when trouble overtakes us. The virtuous part of a life that may afterwards sink in the moral scale is looked back upon with admiration and regret. Justice draws near with reluctance, and sorrows while it smites. 2. *Respect is had to the exhibition of a genuine fellow-sympathy in times of suffering.* "And because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted" (verse 26). Abiathar had been with David in his exile and distress, caused both by the persecution of Saul and the rebellion of Absalom, and shared all the hardships of those trying times. Friendship is cemented and strengthened by suffering. Our love to any one may be measured by the extent we are prepared to suffer for him. The father and brethren of Abiathar were slain for David's sake. Those who show kindness to God's people will have it recompensed to them sooner or later. It is a sad reflection that a friendship that has borne the test of suffering may, nevertheless, prove untrue.

III. That the retribution of a faithless friendship consigns its victim to a condition of shame and obscurity. 1. *It involves a dismissal from the royal presence.* "Get thee to Anathoth, &c." (verse 26). This would be a heavy blow to Abiathar, whose life had hitherto been spent at court, and occupied with the highest affairs of state. He must now exchange the excitement and display of the city for the obscurity of Anathoth. And yet he must have dreaded a heavier punishment when he remembered the fate of Adonijah, and the fate that threatened Joab. His life was mercifully spared, though he was excluded from that which had before been the sunshine and joy of his life—the favour of the king. Cain felt his curse all the more bitterly because he was driven from the presence of the Lord; and the lot of the finally impenitent will be all the more unendurable because they are for ever shut out from the presence of the Great King. 2. *It involves a degradation from the most honourable office.* "So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord" (verse 27). He had disqualified himself for the holy duties of his office by his opposition to that which he knew was the will of God. "The priesthood of Abiathar, as it aggravated his crime, so it shall preserve his life. Such honour have good princes given to the ministers of the sanctuary that their very coat has been defence enough against the sword of justice: how much more should it be of proof against the contempt of base persons!" Saul cruelly slew the father of Abiathar, and eighty-five priests with their families, for a supposed crime: Solomon spares Abiathar himself, though guilty of a real crime. Mark the judgment of history in those two cases: the government of Saul was disgraced and ruined; the throne of Solomon was established. As men are to

God's ministers, they will find Him to them. When circumstances permit, mildness and forgiveness should go hand-in-hand with justice. The highest ecclesiastical office does not lift a man above the power of the law to punish for wrong-doing.

IV. That the retribution of a faithless friendship may be the unconscious fulfilment of a long-threatened judgment against a sinful generation. "That he might fulfil the word of the Lord, which He spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh" (verse 27). Eighty years had rolled away since the words of doom were spoken against the house of Eli, and it seemed very unlikely that they would ever be fulfilled (1 Sam. ii. 31-36). But time has no power to wipe out the Divine record, or to enfeeble the justice of the Divine hand. The deposition of Abiathar involved the rejection of the house of Ithamar (1 Chron. xxiv. 3), to which Eli belonged, and the re-establishment of the high-priesthood in the line of Eleazar, to which Zadok belonged (Num. xxv. 13; 1 Chron. xxiv. 5, 6). The wickedness of a generation cannot be purged away, though its punishment may be arrested by the virtues of individuals. "If God pays slowly, He pays sure. Delay of most certain punishment is neither any hindrance to His justice, nor any comfort to our miseries." Solomon had no immediate intention of punishing the descendants of Eli, and, perhaps, never thought of the prophecy. Man is often the unconscious instrument of carrying out the Divine purposes. Faithlessness will not go unpunished for want of agencies to punish. All the forces of the universe are at the service of the Supreme Judge. Rebellion in a priest, who should teach loyalty, is doubly criminal.

LESSONS:—1. *A treacherous friend may work serious mischief.* 2. *Is punished with reluctance.* 3. *Yet cannot escape the inevitable retribution of his treachery.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 26, 27. Solomon allowed Abiathar to go unpunished at first, which scarcely any other Eastern prince would have done. But when the repeated attempt of Adonijah to seize the kingdom was discovered, Abiathar could no longer be passed over. Yet, instead of inflicting death upon him, he deprived him of his influential office, and let him live at liberty on his estate, on account of his former good behaviour. Here was no severity, but gratitude, kindness, and generosity. Ecclesiastical office can be no protection from just punishment of crime (see Luke xii. 47; 1 Cor. ix. 27). Former fidelity cannot efface later treachery. It is most lamentable that a man who was faithful in times of trouble should end his career as a sinner (1 Cor. x. 12).—*Lange.*

Verse 26. "Thou art worthy of death." **The voice of law to the sinner.** 1. He has forfeited life by transgression. 2. It is the function of law to convince him of that fact. 3. Law offers no gleam of hope as to any escape from death. 4. Christ alone redeems from the curse of the law.

"Because thou hast been afflicted." But for this he had now been a dead man. So God by the rod preventeth the sword; and therefore will not condemn his saints for their sins, because they have suffered (1 Cor. xi. 31), and in His account have suffered double (Isa. xl. 1).—*Trapp.*

Verse 27. Solomon might lawfully take from Abiathar all the revenues of his place, as well as the liberty of officiating in it; but the sacerdotal office, which he received from God, and to which he was anointed, he could not alienate. He was still styled the priest (ch. iv. 4). There is a great difference between depriving a man of the dignity and of the exercise of his function in such a determinate place, and taking from him an authority which was given him by God, and the profits and emoluments which were the gifts of the crown or the nation.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 28-34.

The Retribution of Blood.

Life is a Divine gift, bequeathed as a sacred trust to humanity, to be jealously guarded and carefully cultured. It is susceptible of the loftiest rapture, or the most abject misery. To violate the body, which is the curiously-wrought casket of the life-principle, and to rob it of its priceless jewel, is a sacrilege and a crime. Only He who gave life has an absolute right to resume it. Murder is an unpardonable outrage on humanity; it is the ghastly policy of the cruel tyrant, the final resource of the baffled coward. It is a gross insult to the great Giver of all life, and an offence against the Divine law which cannot go unpunished. The murderer forfeits his own life, and exposes himself to a righteous retribution which sooner or later will fall upon him with overwhelming power. The blood of the innocent victim clamours with unceasing voice for vengeance, and clamours not in vain. Terrible will be the wrath-vials poured upon the head of the blood-shedder, and which he is utterly powerless to avert.

I. The retribution of blood, though delayed, is inevitable. Years had passed away since Joab had recklessly shed the blood of Abner and Amasa; but the crime was not forgotten, nor could it go for ever unrequited. Mere lapse of time has no power to change the nature of things; it weakens nothing; it strengthens nothing. Before Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, the sin a generation old is as new as at the time of its committal, even as the holy aspiration that may be rising from the soul at this moment will be had in remembrance a thousand years hence as it is at this instant of time. Nor can the good deeds of one part of our life atone for the heinous crimes committed at another period. Joab deserved well of his king and country. He was brave and victorious in war; he did much towards the building and beautifying of Jerusalem; he clung faithfully to David in his distresses; and devoted himself to promote the best weal of Israel. But his noblest virtues were unable to ward off the punishment due to his old sins. "It is not in the power of all our deserts to buy off one sin, either with God or man; where life is so deeply forfeited, it admits of no redemption." Often when least expected the stroke of vengeance falls. The long, deep, silent pause in the tempest is most to be dreaded: the storm-king is but gathering strength for a more terrific onset.

II. The retribution of blood is perpetually dreaded. "Then tidings came. . . And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar" (verse 28). The conscience spoke, and the soul was filled with fear. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." No man pursued Adam amid the bowers of Paradise, yet he fled. "I heard thy voice in the garden, and was afraid." No man pursued Cain when the world was in the morning of youth, yet he fled. No man pursued Joab as yet, though the sword of vengeance was busy with those around him, and yet he fled. There was that within him which told him he could not always escape. Oh, what a hell of misery is often carried in the breast of the sinner! His conscience creates the image of his righteous avenger who is ever threatening and ever pursuing him. It is a mere phantom, but none the less real, none the less near, none the less alarming on that account. He cannot escape it; he cannot destroy it. Neither oceans nor continents can separate him from it; it is not at his heels, it is in his heart; it has become a part of himself. He hears the visionary pursuer in every sound. The whispering wind, the rustling leaf, the creak of a swinging branch, the chirp of an insect, seem to betray to his disturbed imagination the immediate presence of the avenger.

> "Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind;
> The thief doth fear each bush an officer."—*Shakespeare.*

III. The retribution of blood respects not the protection of the most sacred asylums. "Behold, he is by the altar. . . Go fall upon him" (verse 29). It had become the custom for malefactors to flee to the altar for safety, though there was no law on the subject, except for accidental homicides. But for the murderer the altar offered no protection (Exod. xxi. 14). There is no citadel, however massive; no cavern, however gloomy; no seclusion, however remote; no spot on earth, however sacred, that can screen the trembling victim from the remorseless avenger of blood. There are some sins too great for any human sanctuary to shelter. But there is a refuge to which the worst transgressor may run, and be assured of safety, pardon, and hope. Christ is that refuge. The victims offered and the blood shed on the altar of the tabernacle, and which sanctified it as a place of refuge, typified the atonement made for the sins of the whole world by the shedding of the blood of Christ, the Paschal Lamb. None, however guilty, but may, by believing in Christ, obtain salvation. Unspeakably happy are they who have taken sanctuary in Him.

> "Betake thee to thy Christ, then, and repose
> Thyself in all extremities, on those
> His everlasting arms,
> Wherewith he girds the heavens, and upholds
> The pillars of the earth."—*Quarles.*

IV. The retribution of blood is in harmony with the Divine law. "And the Lord shall return his blood upon his own head" (verse 32). We are set in the midst of a system of laws which, in their ever active operation, press upon us at all points. While we act in harmony with them they minister to our well-being; but when we violate them they are inexorable in their revenge. 1. *Retribution is in harmony with the law of causation.* We are to-day the result of our conduct yesterday, and the cause of our conduct to-morrow; and thus our present actions must ever be the seeds of future recompense. 2. *It is in harmony with the law of conscience.* It is the province of conscience to approve or condemn. No action of our life is ever lost. Memory reproduces every detail of the past; and conscience smiles or frowns according to its actual character. 3. *It is in harmony with the law of righteousness.* Divine justice binds itself to punish the wicked and reward the good. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

> "Heaven is most just, and of our pleasant vices
> Makes instruments to scourge us."

V. The retribution of blood sometimes reaches, in its effects, beyond its immediate victim. "Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his seed for ever" (verse 33). It is a sentiment frequently set forth in the Old Testament that innocent blood cries to God for vengeance, and that if suffered to go unpunished it brings down a curse and judgment upon the land. This idea seemed present to the mind of David, and influenced his conduct; hence, at the time of Abner's murder, he publicly implored that the judgment of this innocent blood might be averted from his house and kingdom, and that it might rest upon Joab and upon his house (2 Sam. iii. 28, 29). The murderer hands down the stigma of his guilt to his posterity. The history makes no further mention of the descendants of Joab; they sink into inglorious oblivion. What becomes of the children of our great criminals? If it were possible to trace the career of sin in its darkest exploits, what a terrible record would be made!

VI. The retribution of blood is essential to the maintenance of good government. "But upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and

upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the Lord" (verse 33). Either from motives of friendship, or fearing the consequences because of Joab's popularity with the army, David had hesitated to punish the murderer as he deserved; but knowing the power of this man to disturb the peace of the kingdom—an instance of which had just been exhibited in his siding with the treasonable attempt of Adonijah—the dying monarch charged his son to execute upon him the judgment of heaven on the first occasion that justified him in so acting. All government is at an end where crime is allowed to go unpunished; authority is insulted and defied, and anarchy and terror prevail. "It is a foolish niceness," says Bishop Hall, "to put more shame in the doing of justice than in the violating of it. In one act Solomon approved himself both a good magistrate and a good son, fulfilling at once the will of a father and the charge of God." A negligent magistrate will bear the woe of the sin that he is not careful to avenge. Favour to the offender is cruelty to the favourer. The throne is only secure when it sends forth justice irrespective of persons (Prov. xxv. 5).

VII. The retribution of blood is inexorable and complete.—"So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him and slew him" (verse 34). The voice of blood can be silenced only by adequate retribution (Gen. ix. 6). Retribution overtook Joab on the very scene of the most treacherous of his murders; for the tabernacle, at whose altar he perished, was then at Gibeon, and it was at the "great stone which is in Gibeon" that Joab slew Amasa (2 Sam. xx. 8-10). The sword of justice may be for a while mercifully suspended; but when it falls, terrible indeed is the havoc it occasions. The sins of an impenitent life return in vengeance upon the sinner. "Society is like the echoing hills. It gives back to the speaker his words; groan for groan, song for song. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Though human laws cannot be satisfied with anything less than blood for blood, yet if the greatest sinner, even a murderer, fly to the horns of the Divine altar, he shall never be dragged thence.

VIII. The retribution of blood does not extend further than to answer the purpose of God. "And he was buried in his own house in the wilderness" (verse 4). Vengeance did not extend to the dead body of Joab. It is not for man to lay the iniquity upon the bones, whatever God may do. It is a fiendish cruelty that offers the least indignity to a lifeless corpse. Joab was buried in his own family sepulchre attached to his country seat, and in a manner befitting a great warrior, a peer of Israel, and a near relative of the king. "Death puts an end to all quarrels: Solomon stays the penalty when Heaven is satisfied: the revenge that survives death, and will not be shut up in the coffin, is barbarous and unbeseeming true Israelites." The funeral of Joab would suggest to the spectators many solemn reflections on fallen greatness, and the inability of high social status and deeds of valour to screen the wrongdoer from severe retribution.

LEARN—1. *The preciousness of human life.* 2. *That no misery is so great as that of the murderer.* 3. *That Christ can pardon the greatest sinner.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 28-34. **The terrible end of Joab.** 1. He dies conscious of his guilt, without peace and pardon. 2. Even in the very jaws of death he is defiant, rough, and proud. 3. He does not leave the world like a hero, but like a criminal. How differently David dies! (verse 2).—*Lange.*

Of all expositors, *Pellican* only justifies Joab to have been a most faithful servant to David, and seemeth to tax it as a point of ingratitude in David towards him to appoint him to be slain; by his example warning all courtiers of their uncertain condition. But Joab certainly now received

according to his deserts for his bloodshed and faction, which must not go unpunished.—*Mayer.*

Verse 28. "For Joab turned after Adonijah." And that was his bane. If men do not cast away all their transgressions—that "all" is a little word, but of large extent—they perish undoubtedly. Many here, like Benhadad, recover of one disease and die of another.—*Trapp.*

"Joab fled, and caught hold on the horns of the altar." An evil conscience can put to flight a hero who never yielded to the enemy in a single bloody field. Fond Joab, hadst thou formerly sought for counsel from the tabernacle, thou hadst not now needed to seek it for refuge; if thy devotions had not been wanting to that altar, thou hadst not needed it as a shelter. It is the fashion of our foolish presumption to look for protection where we have not cared to yield obedience. Even a Joab clings fast to God's altar in his extremity, which, in his prosperity, he regarded not. The worst men would be glad to make use of God's ordinances for their advantage. Miserable Joab! what help canst thou expect from that sacred pile? Those horns, that were sprinkled with the blood of beasts, abhor to be touched by the blood of men. That altar was for the expiation of sin by blood, not for the protection of the sin of blood. If Adonijah fled thither and escaped, it is murder that pursues thee more than conspiracy. God hath no sanctuary for a wilful homicide.—*Bishop Hall.*

Verse 30. "Nay; but I will die here." The sullen stubbornness of crime. 1. It gloomily accepts the inevitable. 2. It expects no mercy. 3. Is indifferent about desecrating the most sacred place. 4. Seeks, in dying, to throw the utmost odium on those who inflict the punishment.

Verse 31. "That thou mayest take away the innocent blood." David had never formally pardoned Joab; and, indeed, it may be questioned whether by the law there was any power of pardoning a murderer (see Numbers xxxv. 16-34; Deut. xix. 33). The utmost that the king could do was to neglect to enforce the law. Even in doing this he incurred a danger. Unpunished murder was a pollution to the land (Numbers xxxv. 33), and might bring a judgment upon it like the famine which had been sent a few years before this on account of Saul and of his bloody house, "because he slew the Gibeonites" (2 Sam. xxi. 1). Or the judgment might fall upon the negligent monarch, or his house, as punishment fell upon Eli and his house, for not chastising the wickedness of his sons (1 Sam. iii. 13).—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 32. "Who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he"—who had done Joab no wrong, nor meant him any, and, had they lived, might probably have done David better service. If the blood shed be not only innocent but excellent, the life more valuable than common lives, the crime is the more heinous. Joab is put to death for the murder of Abner and Amasa, rather than for his treasonable adherence to Adonijah.

Verse 34. "So Benaiah went up and slew him." Joab must have been old and infirm at this time; and now he bleeds for Abner, he bleeds for Amasa, and he bleeds for Uriah. The two former he murdered; of the blood of the latter he was not innocent. Yet he had done the state much service, and they knew it; but he was a murderer, and vengeance would not suffer him to live.—*Dr. A. Clarke.*

Verse 35. The reward of a tried fidelity. 1. *That there are crises when fidelity is severely tried.* 1. In times of national distress and rebellion. 2. In times of personal affliction and helplessness. 3. In times of secret temptation and outrageous threatening. 2. *That the maintenance of fidelity in times of trial has a good influence on the unstable.* 1. Rebellion is more easily suppressed. 2. The authority of go-

vernment is more firmly established. 3. It is an education to fit for nobler and more important service. 3. *That fidelity severely tried is sure to meet with reward.* 1. It secures the satisfaction of an approving conscience for duty done. 2. It wins the confidence and generosity of the highest authorities. 3. It conducts to positions of high honour and responsibility. A faithful man makes himself indispensable. 4. It exalts the character of the office disgraced by the unfaithfulness of others.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 36-46.

The Retribution of a Curse.

It is a striking testimony to the power of Christianity, that those who have been trained under its influence find much that is painful to their feelings in transactions which would, even in modern times, appear perfectly reasonable, just, and even laudable, among Eastern nations. The greatest oriental magnates were animated by the spirit of the age in which they lived; and we might as well complain that they travelled from Dan to Beersheba on the slow-footed ass, rather than by the rapid rail, as that they were not in all things actuated by the spirit of a later revelation and a later time. The series of stern retributions recorded in this chapter must be viewed and interpreted in the light of the times in which they took place. Many have complained that in the case of Shimei an unwonted measure of severity is shown. There is much force in the remarks made by Dr. Kitto:—"Upon the whole, it seems to us that in this incident, as in many other austere circumstances of Scripture history, the apparent difficulty disappears, or becomes greatly attenuated, when all the circumstances are closely weighed, and when we contemplate the subject not exclusively from our own point of view, but from that of contemporaries, and in connection with influences—religious, political, and social—very different from our own, but which some degree of careful study may enable us to realize. The more this is done, the more 'digestible' many of the hardest things of Scripture history will appear. One thing is certain, that there is not a word or hint in the Sacred Book to show that the conduct of David and Solomon to Joab, Shimei, Adonijah, or Abiathar, was regarded as other than perfectly right and just, if not laudable, by the people of the age and country in which David and Solomon lived. Indeed, we may be sure that Solomon was too sagacious to disfigure the commencement of his reign by acts abhorrent to the public opinion of his time. And if he had that sanction—as we are sure he had—we feel that, in matters not affecting any principle of God's ancient law, we have no right to stigmatise his conduct as unjust or barbarous, although, with our keener sense—with our Christian and occidental perceptions—of human obligations, we turn with relief from the grim severities of this blood-stained page." In reviewing the conduct and fate of Shimei observe:—

I. That a curse is the offspring of a spirit of bitter rancour and hostility. Shimei was of the house of Saul, and strongly resented the loss of royalty to the Benjamites, and all prospect of preferment to himself. He unjustly charged David with being the cause of the ruin of the Sauline dynasty, and conceived a violent hatred towards him. While David was in prosperity and power, Shimei dared not assail him; but when, in a day of adversity, David and his followers had in their flight come to Bahurim, Shimei came out from his house, situated on an elevated ridge near the roadside, and poured on the humbled and distressed monarch a torrent of outrageous curses (2 Sam. xvi. 5-13). The greatest swearer is the greatest coward. There are men with hearts so full of hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, that their lips constantly burn with freshly uttered blasphemies; their stomachs are so foul that they must needs

spit up the loathsome venom with which they are overcharged, and they care not on whom it shall fall. If there is no special object of their spite before them, they will curse all round, and end by cursing themselves. To curse is the most contemptible method of revenge; it is an evidence of utter impotency, and a horrid revelation of a most fiendish nature. Just as Shimei cast dust (*ib.* v. 13) which would be harmless to those he abused, and would doubtless be blown again into his own eyes, so the curses of the vile blasphemer often return in fearful retribution upon himself. Shimei was a dangerous, bad man, equal to any intrigue, and finding his recreation in plotting wickedness. With some monarchs such a man would not be suffered to be at large. There are some men who are not fit to be trusted out of sight, and the swearer is often of that class.

II. That the retribution of a curse is sometimes mercifully delayed. 1. *The delay affords space for repentance and reformation.* The evildoer misapprehends the slowness of the Divine punishment, as though it were an evidence of weakness. God hesitates, that man may relent and find forgiveness. But, oh! the blindness of the human heart—"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccles. viii. 11). The lull in the tempest enables the skilful mariner to repair damages, and prepare for the worst; so the stillness of God should suggest to the sinner the importance of a prompt and penitent search after salvation. 2. *The delay is conditional* (verses 36, 37). Shimei was to be a prisoner at large in Jerusalem, and not to pass a certain boundary outside the city, formed by a circle drawn from the brook Kidron. To infringe that condition, on any pretence whatever, would render him worthy of death. "Besides the old grudge, no doubt Solomon saw cause to suspect the fidelity of Shimei, as a man who was ever known to be hollow to the house of David. The obscurity of a country life would easily afford him more safe opportunities of secret mischief; many eyes shall watch him in the city; he cannot look out unseen, he cannot whisper unheard. Upon no other terms shall he enjoy his life, which the least straying shall forfeit."—*Bp. Hall.* All our blessings are conditional. As a limit was fixed for the restless Shimei, so is it necessary that we should set a limit to our affections, desires, and ambitions. 3. *The mercy of delayed retribution should be gratefully acknowledged* (verse 38). Shimei recognized the justice and clemency of the conditions imposed on him, and solemnly pledged himself to observe them. He looked for death, and lo! life was continued. The sinner has reason to praise God for every moment his punishment is delayed. He best shows his gratitude for the gracious respite by striving to be obedient. St. Bernard, one of the holiest of the church's saints, was in the habit of constantly warning himself by the grave enquiry—"Bernard, for what purpose art thou here?" The thoughtful penitent may profit by frequently putting to himself the question—"For what purpose art thou spared?"

III. That the retribution of a curse is hastened by some fresh act of disobedience. 1. *Man is tempted to disobedience by the love of temporal gain* (verses 39, 40). Avarice is the root of all evil. The loss of two servants led Shimei to disobedience, even to forget his oath and risk his life. "Covetousness and presumption of impunity," says Bishop Hall, "are the destruction of many a soul. Shimei seeks his servants, and loses himself! How many are there who cry out of this folly, and yet imitate it! These earthly things either are our servants, or should be. How commonly do we see men run out of the bounds set them by God's law, to hunt after them till their souls incur a fearful judgment!" 2. *Disobedience is ungrateful.* Shimei had acknowledged the kind forbearance shown him, and engaged himself by an oath to observe the condition. He ignored his obligation, and forgot the kindness he had received. For-

getfulness is a reckless destroyer of gratitude, and a prolific cause of disobedience. Men sin because they "forget" the commandments of the Lord. It is the depth of ingratitude to rebel against our best benefactor, to slight his commands, to depreciate his goodness, and frustrate his purpose. 3. *Disobedience is dangerous.* This Shimei discovered to his cost. Let the skater disregard the warning, "Beware!" and it is no marvel if he is suddenly immersed under the treacherous ice. A certain rebel chieftain—a principal leader in one of the most sanguinary risings of the Irish against the government—died from a grievous malady contracted by his wearing poisoned boots, which, it is said, were sent him in a present. The disobedient walk in poisoned boots, and to continue the practice is sure to prove fatal (Ezek. xviii. 20)!

IV. That the retribution of a curse falls at last with awful severity. 1. *The grounds of retribution are rehearsed* (verses 42-45). Stress is laid upon Shimei's violation of his own oath, and of the king's commands. He is also reminded of his former crimes: there was no need to call witnesses in proof—his own heart was privy to it all (verse 44). The heart is privy to much more wickedness than ever appeared without. The punishment for any one sin brings up unpleasant recollections of all the sinful past. The retribution of the wicked will be justified in the light of Divine justice, and in the reflected light of his own sinful history. 2. *The retribution is complete.* "So Benaiah fell upon him that he died" (verse 46). Vengeance against rebels may sleep; it cannot die. Shimei's fate plainly proves the truth of the word (Job xxxiv. 11; Psa. cxli. 10; Prov. v. 22). Divine justice at length overtakes those whose crimes have long been unpunished, and when they least expect it. Those also who have cursed the anointed of the Lord, the eternal King of God's realm, and who have shot their poisoned shafts at Him, shall hereafter say to the mountains, Fall on us! and to the hills, Cover us! (Luke xxiii. 30). How weak and forgetful of his word would the king have seemed to all the people if he had let Shimei now go free, particularly with the notions then entertained about a king! (Prov. xvi. 12-15; xx. 2, 26).—*Lange.*

V. The retribution of a curse tends to strengthen the authority of government. "And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon" (verse 46). All malcontents and rebels were now removed or subdued: his own subjects were affectionately bound to him, and the surrounding nations either dreaded him, or did not think proper to make him their enemy. The union of mildness and firmness, generosity and official justice, in the conduct of the young sovereign in the treatment of his foes, must have deeply impressed the people, have increased his authority, and established his rule. It is a comforting thought to the believer, that the kingdom of Messiah is firmly established, notwithstanding the rage and tumult of His adversaries. In Him the throne of David is established for ever (verse 45; see also 2 Sam. vii. 13, 16; Psalm lxxxix. 4, 36, &c.) The time is approaching when all the enemies of Christ shall perish, and His righteous government be universally acknowledged and obeyed.

LESSONS:—1. *A swearer is always something worse.* 2. *A foul mouth is its own condemnation.* 3. *The impenitent blasphemer will be rigorously punished.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 36. "Build thee an house in Jerusalem." Shimei was no further to be trusted than he might be seen, and is therefore confined and kept within compass. So should our deceitful hearts be dealt with. Set

a jealous eye upon them, or else they will give you the slip, as David's did (Psalm xxxix. 1, 2). He said he would look to his ways and bridle his tongue; but presently after he shows how he broke his word (verse 3).

Verses 36, 37. The power of evil circumscribed. 1. Though evil is a power, it is not the greatest power. 2. Evil is checked and limited by the superior power of law. 3. Law enforces its authority by adequate penalties. 4. When the limits of law are transgressed, its penalties are inflicted. 5. The extreme penalty of violated law is death.

Verse 39. The temptations of avarice. 1. Are irresistible to the depraved. 2. Lead to the transgression of hitherto observed restrictions. 3. Allure the victim to inevitable destruction.

"And they told Shimei"—either for good or for evil will; so shall a man sooner or later hear of his faults, either by his friends or his foes; and malice, though an ill judge, may be a good informer.—*Trapp.*

Verse 40. "And Shimei went to Gath. Sin, the way of death. The walker therein is—1. Passion-blinded. 2. Devil-driven. 3. Judgment-stricken.

— "And it was told Solomon." Kings have long ears, and more eyes than their own.

Verse 42, 43. The precept here was a mutual adjuration. Shimei swore not to go; Solomon swore his death if he went. The one oath must be revenged; the other must be kept. If Shimei were false in offending, Solomon will be just in punishing.—*Bishop Hall.*

Oaths should bind to good abearance (behaviour); but some can play with them as apes do with nuts, or monkeys with their collars, which they slip on and off again at pleasure.—*Trapp.* Perjury is a crime for which the avenging God will visit.

Verses 41-46. This proceeding appears very harsh to the subjective modern view of history. Shimei has surely, it is thought, committed no great offence, if he has brought back his slaves, which he probably bought and paid for with hard cash, and thus helped himself to his own lawful property. Perhaps he thought also that his journey to Gath was no transgression of the royal command, because he did not require to cross the Kidron. On such grounds expositors have endeavoured to excuse Shimei, and, at the same time, to prove Solomon's rigour. But Shimei cannot be exculpated. The subtle evasion is refused by the plain words of the text, which forbid him to go any whither out of Jerusalem (verses 36, 42); and the reference to the cash which his slaves may have cost him is no less an empty argument. If Shimei wished to remain true to his oath, he should have informed the king of the flight of his slaves, petitioned him for leave to bring them back, and awaited his directions; but he ought not to have lightly broken his oath. In his perjury lay his guilt, and he had no excuse, as Solomon showed him; to which was added his high treason against David. In the punishment of his crime Solomon thus only vindicated the Divine right, and might therefore have regarded it as a retribution suspended over Shimei for his transgression, for which God will bless him by the fulfilment of the promise made to David of the perpetual duration of his throne.—*Keil.*

A sure, though late judgment attends those that dare lift up either their hand or tongue against the sacred persons of God's vicegerents. How much less will the God of heaven suffer unavenged the insolencies and blasphemies against His own Divine Majesty! It is a fearful word, He should not be just if he should hold these guiltless.—*Bishop Hall.*

CHAPTER III.

THE RULE OF WISDOM.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Pharaoh, king of Egypt—Probably Vaphres, but Winer suggests Psusennes. An alliance with so mighty a royal house shows that the Hebrew kingdom enjoyed high renown, and commanded influence among the nations. From the Egyptian monuments a supposed portrait of this princess has been obtained. The "Song of Solomon" is supposed to have her as the immediate theme. Brought her into the city of David—Not admitted into the stronghold of Zion, where the ark was; probably he found for her a temporary home in his mother's residence (Song iii. 4, viii. 2) while his own palace was building. This marriage is never censured in Scripture, so that it is natural to conclude she became a proselyte to the Hebrew religion. To this, Psalm xlv. 10-11 may refer, a Psalm which is thought, in addition to the Canticles, to have been composed by Solomon in her honour. Verse 2. Only the people sacrificed in high places—This is not recorded as a wrong act, but as rendered necessary until the Temple could accommodate them. Verse 4. The king went to Gibeon to worship there: for the tabernacle was now there (2 Chron. i. 3), called *the great high place*, because of that fact. *High places*, בָּמוֹת, *i.e.*, hills, and mountain heights: were chosen by all ancient nations for worship and sacrifice. Danger rose out of this temporarily permitted practice (Deut. xii. 13-14); but in Solomon's conduct now there was nothing wrong. After the Temple was completed, the "high places" should have been abandoned; but the habit had become formed, and hence the snare. A thousand burnt offerings—As an act of national consecration and homage to Jehovah; its motive being, "Solomon loved the Lord" (verse 3). Verse 5. In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon—Probably during this sacrificial festival. Verse 7. A little child: נַעַר קָטֹן a weak boy; but it is an error to suppose him only twelve years of age (as say the Rabbins, and after them Keil); for David called him a "man" (chapter ii. 9) before this incident, and after forty years' reign he is called זָקֵן "old" (chapter xi. 4); hence he must have been at least twenty years of age. But he felt himself a mere "child" in matters of royal responsibility and national government. Verse 9. An understanding heart לֵב שֹׁמֵעַ "a heart hearkening to the voice of God" (Keil); "obedient heart" (Luther); *cor docile* (Vulgate); literally, *a hearing heart*, not self-confident, but eager to learn. Verse 11. To discern judgment—Lit., to *hear* judgment; and Lange observes "a right sentence depends upon the *hearing*, *i.e.*, the trial of the parties; and for this, understanding and judgment are most requisite for the judge" (comp. 2 Sam. xiv. 17). Verse 13. Not asked; both riches and honour: כָּבוֹד *honour* is here promised as answering to "the life of thine enemies" (verse 11), and may therefore be regarded as a promise of military honour, victory over enemies, or the glory to be won by the bloodless triumphs of his far-famed wisdom. Verse 15. Behold, it was a dream—yet not a mere creation of the fancy, but a real incident, "a divine vision in a dream (Theodoreti). The sequel proved it to have been more than a dream. Verse 16. Harlots—The Rabbins derive זֹנוֹת from זוּן, to feed, nourish; and the Targumist translates the word here, and in Josh. ii. 1, by פּוּנדקן, pundekon, *hostesses*, tavern-keepers. Verse 20. Laid her dead child in my bosom—In order to escape the suspicion and charge of having killed her own child. Verse 26. Her bowels yearned upon her son: רַחֲמִים, a Hebrew phrase for the seat of feeling, hence here "the tender mother love" (Keil); "for her motherly heart burned for her son" (Luther). Verse 27. Saw that the wisdom of God was in him Not that there was anything supernatural in Solomon's method of settling this dispute, but that it proved this youthful king had penetrating discernment and acquaintance with the workings of the human heart.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-3.

THE PARADOXES OF A DEFECTIVE PIETY.

We obtain a glimpse in these verses of the state of religion in the nation at this period. The enemies of Solomon had been despatched, the throne was established in the popular affection, and the government of the youthful king had

already won the respect of surrounding nations. The only thing that indicated the kingdom was not so thoroughly established in all respects as it might be, was the unsettled condition of public worship. "Only the people sacrificed in high places." The practices of the heathen still clung to the worshippers of the one living and true God. The growth of the religious life of a people is slow: it is a long time before all traces of a previous period of imperfection and debasement disappear. The best guarantee of permanency in all earthly governments is a strong, healthy, propagative piety; and in the process of development towards a more perfect knowledge and experience many contradictions will appear.

I. That piety may include a devout love of God, and yet be defective. "And Solomon loved the Lord." So far good. It does not say he loved the Lord *with all his heart*. The command in this respect was most explicit, and frequently repeated (Deut. xiii. 3, xxx. 6; Matt. xxii. 37; Mark xii. 30, 33, Luke x. 27). The religion of some is purely *intellectual;* they conceive noble ideas of God; they construct an ideal paradise, and adorn and fill it with bright poetic fancies; they scorn to betray the least feeling—this would be altogether too gross and sensual; they live in an ever-revolving circle of refined mental intoxication. The religion of others is all *emotional;* they have tears for everybody and everything; they are a power in society, and they know it, for we are all most easily moved through our sympathies. But excess of feeling is penicious—it over-rides the judgment, and is apt to degenerate into weakness and folly. The victim of emotion goads himself in vain efforts to produce certain sensational effects which will not admit of repetition according to order, and at last sinks into a condition of helplessness, and is constantly employed in a morbid dissection of his own miserable and over-wrought feelings. The religion of others consists in a blind and dogged devotion to some one *moral precept;* it is obtruded into everything; it is the oracle to interpret every problem, the key to fit the complicated wards of human opinion and unlock every mystery; it is with them the infallible touchstone by which to test the religion of everybody else. Such people have no conception of the harmony and continuity of universal truth. It is possible to love God with a devout and reverential affection, and yet be defective in the realization and practical presentment of the religious life.

II. That piety may influence the practical outgoings of the individual life, and yet be defective. "Walking in the statutes of David his father." These "statutes" referred, not only to the directions which had been specially enjoined on Solomon by his father David (1 Kings ii. 2-4; 1 Chr. xxviii. 8, 9), but also to the Divine commandments which David loved, and (notwithstanding some grievous falls) ordinarily practised. They who love God will strive to regulate their every-day life according to the Divine precepts, and in imitation of the holiest examples. The best of human examples is imperfect; and the most devoted and conscientious Christian worker is painfully conscious of constantly coming far short of his own ideal of duty. There are contradictions in the individual Christian life difficult to reconcile—the most saintly have to mourn over innumerable defects.

III. That piety may be demonstrative in acts of worship, and yet be defective. "He sacrificed and burnt incense in high places" (verse 3). The heathen were accustomed to perform their religious rites on the summit of lofty mountains, under the idea that they were thus nearer Deity and heaven. Abraham built his altars on mountains (Gen. xii. 8; xxii. 2), and worshipped in a grove (Gen. xxi. 33)—whence the custom among the Jews was derived, and for which they were not reprehensible till the law obliged them to worship in one

place (Deut. xii. 5, 6). The law did not forbid "high places" directly, but only by implication. It required the utter destruction of all the high places which had been polluted by idolatrous rites (Deut. xii. 2). The injunction to offer sacrifices nowhere but at the door of the tabernacle (Lev. xvii. 3-5) was an indirect prohibition of high-places, or, at least, of the use which the Israelites made of them; but there was some real reason to question whether this was a command intended to come into force until the place was chosen where the Lord would cause His name to dwell (Deut. xii. 11, 14). The result was that high places were used for the worship of Jehovah from the time of the Judges downwards (Judg. vi. 25; xiii. 16; 1 Sam. vii. 10, xiii. 9, xiv. 35, xvi. 5; 1 Chron. xxi. 26), with an entire unconsciousness of guilt on the part of those who used them. And God so far "winked" at this ignorance that He accepted the worship thus offered Him, as appears from the vision vouchsafed to Solomon on this occasion. There were two reasons for the prohibition of high places:—1st, the danger of the old idolatry creeping back if the old localities were retained for worship; and, 2nd, the danger to the unity of the nation if there should be more than one legitimate religious centre. The existence of worship at high places did, in fact, facilitate the division of the kingdom.—*Speaker's Commentary.* The worship of God is not confined to any one particular spot—the devotion of the worshipper, and the manifestations of Divine blessing, consecrate the locality. We may worship God with all the proprieties of external ceremonial, and with all the ardour of a devout spirit; and yet the religion of the life be defective. Few men carry into all the departments of practical duty the holy and exalted feeling realized in their best moments at the Mercy Seat.

IV. That piety may be liberal in sacrifices, and yet be defective. "A thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar." A sacrifice of a thousand victims was an act of royal magnificence suited to the greatness of Solomon. So Xerxes offered a thousand oxen at Troy (Herod. vii. 43). We are not to suppose that Solomon offered sacrifice with his own hand; such a task was beyond the power of a single person to do. He simply presented the victims. Scores of priests officiated on such occasions, and the sacred festival lasted many days. Where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap accordingly; and those who truly love Him and His worship will not grudge the expenses of their religion. The liberality of the wealthy is the easiest part of Christian duty, and few give to God's cause in proportion to their means. Giving is, to some natures, the severest test of a genuine piety, and one of its best evidences. There may be a princely generosity in giving, while there is a niggardliness in doing. The most opulent sacrifices cannot atone for active, loving, faithful service.

V. That piety may be associated with great worldly affluence, and yet be defective. "And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh, king of Egypt." It was an evidence of the importance into which the kingdom of Israel had risen that Solomon should succeed in forming an alliance with Egypt, the most ancient and splendid of the Eastern monarchies. It was the first intercourse between these nations since the time of the Exodus. Its immediate effect was probably favourable to Solomon, by increasing his fame and comparative importance among the nations, and adding to his dominions (chap. ix. 16). Riches flowed in upon him, kings courted his favour and were proud to form alliances with his house. There is no reason why piety should not flourish in the king's palace as well as in the humble cottage: there are many among the great and wealthy who fear God and work righteousness. It is not an easy matter to settle which are the most difficult to bear—the dangers of the rich, or the temptations and miseries of the starving poor. It is possible to be surrounded with temporal abundance, while the heart is restless and unsatisfied.

Solomon had all that his soul could desire, and the result was detrimental rather than helpful to his piety. His marriage with the Egyptian princess, though not formally condemned, opened the way to other alliances that were disastrous. According to the letter of the law, only marriage with the Canaanitish tribes was forbidden to the Jews (Ex. xxxiv. 16); and inter-marriage with nations outside of Canaan was not only not prohibited, but tolerated in the examples, never rebuked, of Joseph's marriage with the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Gen. xli. 45); of Moses' marriage with a daughter of Midian (Ex. ii. 21); and that of Boaz and Ruth. But though the law did not forbid these marriages, they were not in harmony with its spirit; and it was by foreign marriages that Solomon was at length seduced from the worship of Jehovah. Piety is safest when it is humblest; and only as the believer retains his humble, child-like trust in God, amid increasing temporal prosperity, will he escape the perils that threaten.

LESSONS:—1. *There is danger in resting satisfied with the mere externalism of religion.* 2. *There may be much that is morally good in individual character, and yet a serious deficiency in piety.* 3. *True piety demands the full surrender to God of will, affection, and life.*

THIS passage may be also homiletically treated as follows:—

PIETY LIMITED BY OPPORTUNITY.

I. That piety is limited by individual experience. 1. *It is limited by the individual experience of the love of God.* "Solomon loved the Lord" (verse 3). He was first loved by Him, and was thus called *Jedidiah*, the darling of Jehovah. Our love to God is but the reflex of His love to us (1 John iv. 19). Our piety receives its character and attains its limits by the nature and degree of our love to God: as our love is, so is our piety. Love is the source and power of the religious life, and the stream can never rise higher than the fountain. 2. *It is limited by the examples of those we are taught to imitate.* Solomon walked in the statutes of David his father, and strove to copy his example. A good man is a pattern for all to imitate; and all men are more potently influenced by a living example of piety, than by the most elaborate code of precepts, however eloquently explained or cogently enforced. It was a high commendation to the Thessalonian converts that they became imitators of the highest patterns of Christian excellence (1 Thess. i. 6). All human models are imperfect, and the characters shaped and influenced by them must partake of their imperfections. The example of Christ is the absolute, all-perfect standard, the great infallible pattern after which the noblest life must ever be moulded. 3. *It is limited by individual capacity.* The dew falls in quantity sufficient to water the whole earth, but there is an endless variety in the capacities of the flower-cups held out to receive the refreshing draught; some are so small that one crystal drop each would fill their tiny fragile goblets. So the blessing of heaven descends upon mankind in superabundant measure, but there is a vast diversity in the capacity of the individual recipient. The grandest created nature is bounded by its finiteness. If man were not finite he could not grow.

II. That piety is limited by the opportunities for its cultivation. "Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the Lord" (verse 2). The frequent public worship of God is founded in a necessity and tendency of human nature. Man will worship, and if he is not constantly directed to the great Object of all true and acceptable worship, and spiritually assisted in the exercise, he is apt to regard the vast fabric of created things as God; and nature, with her grand, silent motions, becomes the object of his pantheistic idolatry. The multiplicity and accessibleness of Christian

ordinances in the present day lead many to undervalue their importance. But a compulsory and prolonged absence from the house of God, and the conscious depreciation in spirituality, rectify the delusion, and compel the sufferer to estimate more highly than ever the public means of grace.

II. That piety is limited by the associations and conditions of national life. "And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh" (verse 1). The alliance with Egypt, and growing importance and wealth of the nation, would have a powerful influence in developing and forming the character of the nation at that time. National life is the outcome and representation of many conflicting and contradictory causes, some apparent, some hidden; but all active. Climate, natural scenery, employments, modes of living, intercourse with each other and with other peoples, all act and react in giving form, colour, tone, and spirit to the national character. The ruggedness and strength of the free mountaineers are strangely contrasted with the refinement, softness, and supineness of the inhabitants of the sultry plains; and the causes of the difference are evident. And so the associations and conditions of national life affect and limit the piety of a people. There will be more vigour and enterprise in the religion of a nation struggling for independence and extended commerce, than in a nation reposing in contentment, and revelling in luxuries and riches. Success in either individuals or communities is often a fatal advantage, and the period of greatest prosperity registers the beginning of decline.

LESSONS:—1. *That the opportunities for cultivating personal piety are abundant.* 2. *That it is an imperative duty to strive after a higher standard of piety.* 3. *That the actual use made of opportunities will be the measure of personal piety enjoyed.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-4. National reformation. 1. Meets with rebellious opposition. 2. Is gradual in accomplishment. 3. Must be wisely conducted. 4. Is facilitated by promoting amicable relations with other nations. 5. Aims at strengthening the internal government. 6. Is permanent in its results only when it grows out of a genuine religious life.

Verse 1. Marriage. 1. An important crisis in individual life. 2. Not to be entered into without serious thought. 3. May make or mar the happiness of two lives. 4. Is honourable in all. 5. Broadens our sympathies for the race. 6. Has the divine sanction.

— Although marriage with persons of unlike faith be allowed, and is in itself no sin (1 Cor. vii. 14), it is, nevertheless, better that one avoid it, because the unbeliever perverts the believer more frequently than the believer converts the unbeliever. Solomon's marriage with a daughter of Pharaoh was, strictly speaking, a political alliance, but it has also a significance in the history of redemption. The great and mighty king of the land which for Israel had been "the house of bondage," in which it had eaten "the bread of affliction" (Ex. xx. 2; Deut. xvi. 3), gives now to the king of this once despised and oppressed people his daughter in marriage, and must, in the providence of God, contribute to the strengthening of the Israelitish throne, and to the increase of the power and glory of the Israelitish kingdom. God has the hearts of all men in his hands, and can bring it to pass that they who have been inimical to us, and have despised us, shall hold us in great honour (Prov. xvi. 7; Gen. xxxi. 24).—*Lange.*

— This seems to have been Solomon's first act of foreign policy, and was, perhaps, designed to counteract the influence of Hadad, the Edomite, who had fled to Egypt during David's reign, and was now securely housed in the royal family (see chap. xi. 14-22). Everything in the history of Hadad

naturally conspired to make him a settled enemy of the kingdom of Israel; and, perhaps, at a later period, he had a hand with Jeroboam in planning the revolt of the ten tribes of Israel. Solomon doubtless expected to strengthen his kingdom by this affinity with Egypt, and to prevent invasion from that quarter.—*Whedon.*

— "Until he had made an end of building the house of the Lord." This Solomon would finish before he would set up the queen's palace—such was his zeal while young; but he suffered sad decays afterwards. I read of a holy man who oft prayed that he might keep up his young zeal with his old discretion.—*Trapp.*

Verse 2. "Only the people sacrificed in high places." The particle "only" has reference to the last sentence of chap. ii. 46. This is not mentioned as a circumstance of blame either in the people or in the king; for had they not sacrificed and burnt incense on high places, they could not have sacrificed or burnt incense at all. And it appears by the sequel that the sacrifice at Gibeon was acceptable.—*Bishop Horsley.* Possibly Solomon thought it better to allow an error in a circumstance than to occasion a neglect of the substance of God's worship, which he apprehended would follow upon a severe prohibition of that practice, because the people's hearts were generally and constantly set upon these high places, as appears from all the following history; and they were not willing to submit to so much trouble and charge as the bringing of all their sacrifices to one place would cause; nor would they yield to it until the temple was built, which he knew would easily incline and oblige them to it. And that being speedily to be done, he might think it more advisable rather to delay the execution of that law of God for an approaching season, wherein he doubted not they would be sweetly and freely drawn to it, than at present to drive them to it by force, although these and all other prudential considerations should have given place to the will and wisdom of God.—*Pool.*

Verse 3. "Walking in the statutes of David his father"—the customs, usages, and laws of religious conduct practised by David. But it does not appear that David ever sacrificed or burnt incense in high places. The contrary is implied in this verse; and it is more than intimated that though this worship was tolerated because not offered to false gods, and because there was no house yet built to Jehovah, still both Solomon and his people were censurable for allowing it such great extent and prominence, and thereby paving the way for future idolatry in Israel. It would have been safer and better to have sacrificed only before the ark of the covenant, as Solomon did after his return from Gibeon (verse 15), or else only at Gibeon, where the tabernacle was (1 Chron. xvi. 39).—*Whedon.*

Verses 2-4. Solomon's sacrificial festivity. 1. When he celebrated it—at the beginning of his reign, to return thanks for the past assistance of God, and to implore its continuance. 2. Where he kept it—upon the high place at Gibeon, because no temple was built as yet, the place of prayer in the Old and in the New Testament. Though God dwell not in temples built by human hands, yet it is needful for each congregation to have a house where, with one mouth, it praises the name of the Lord. Where this need is not felt, there is a defect in faith and love for the Lord.—*Lange.*

Verse 3. He loved the Lord. This is the best and greatest thing that can be said of a man. So every one that loves the world has not in him the love of the Father; this is only where God is loved above all things, His word observed, and His commandments fulfilled with joy and delight (1 John ii. 5, 15; v. 3). Happy is he who, to the question of the Lord, "Lovest thou me?" can return the answer of Peter (John xxi. 17). Because Solomon loved the Lord, he honoured also his father, and walked in his ways.

The want of filial piety in our day comes from want of love to the Lord. —*Lange.*

Verse 4. Gibeon was well worthy to be the chief, yea, the only high place. There was the hallowed altar of God; there was the tabernacle, though, as then, severed from the ark; thither did young Solomon go up, and as desiring to begin his reign with God, there he offers no less than a thousand sacrifices.—*Bishop Hall.*

If we should begin our daily work with the sacrifice of our prayer, how much more our life's calling, and every weighty undertaking upon which our own and the well-being of other men depend!—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 5-15.

A Dream of Wisdom and its Reality.

A period of special devotion is often succeeded by the brightest visions of God, and by rich endowments of supernatural grace. In ancient times a common mode of Divine revelation to man was by a dream (see Num. xii. 6; Matt. i. 20; Matt. ii. 13, 19, &c.) In such cases the soul was raised to a state of Divine ecstacy and illumination, and held conscious intercourse with God and heavenly intelligences; but when the soul woke to its natural condition of consciousness, the person knew it was a dream, though the reality of the Divine communication remained. So God appeared to Solomon in a dream; and the youthful king saw more with his eyes shut than ever they could see open—even Him who is Invisible! "Solomon worships God by day: God appears to him by night. Well may we look to enjoy God when we have served Him; the night cannot but be happy, whose day hath been holy." The experience of Solomon during the night spent within the sacred city of Gibeon had a mighty influence upon his future conduct and destiny.

I. That wisdom is a Divine gift (verses 5, 12). 1. *The ordinary endowments of wisdom are from God* (Jas. i. 17). The gifts of genius may exist apart from the personal enjoyment of Divine grace. Tremendous is the responsibility of men who are endowed with superior talents, and great will be the punishment for their abuse. Bezaleel was "filled with the Spirit of God in wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship"; but this does not imply that he possessed the highest gifts of grace. It is said of Othniel that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel" (Judg. iii. 10); the power conferred being not necessarily connected with his piety, but referred to his superior tact in governing the people. Many of the sons of genius have not been children of the Spirit. Scotland's most honoured bard was the slave of one of the lowest appetites, and fell a victim to its sinful indulgence. The highest poetic genius in England in modern times was obliged to banish himself, because of his vices, from the society of the honourable and virtuous. Gifts are often found where the graces are not. We must not undervalue gifts, for they come from God; but we must beware of being satisfied with them. 2. *The unique wisdom of Solomon was from God.* "Lo, I have given thee" (verse 12). It is the good pleasure of God to give wisdom to them that seek for it. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him" (Jas. i. 5). Solomon's wisdom was, to a certain extent, a supernatural gift, a signal dispensation of Divine favour, which must not be classed with natural acquirements, which are ordinarily obtained by dint of mental application alone. But while this much appears upon the face of the history, we must not suppose that all his knowledge was so special and supernatural an endowment as that he received it without any effort on his part. He doubtless studied and toiled like

other men for his acquirements; but he was divinely and supernaturally assisted in a manner and to an extent which no other man ever enjoyed. We shall see further in chap. iv. 29-34 that Solomon's wisdom comprehended natural science, political sagacity, and a deep insight into spiritual truth.—*Whedon.* As an acute philosopher, and a wise, judicious king, Solomon stood alone—"There was not like unto thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee." Trapp observes, "He was not only wiser than Trismegist, Orpheus, Homer, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Lycurgus, Ptolemy; but also Abraham, Moses, David, yea, even Adam himself after the fall. He was the wisest mere man, take him for everything, as ever was; insomuch as he had all manner of knowledge, natural and supernatural, infused into him." Solomon saw around him the materials out of which a great and prosperous kingdom could be made, if he only had discretion to use them; and his prayer indicated that this and all other special endowments were in the gift of God.

II. That wisdom is to be diligently sought in prayer. 1. *Prayer for wisdom gratefully recognizes the Divine mercy in the blessings already enjoyed.* "Thou hast showed unto thy servant David great mercy" (verses 6, 7). A good child will remember his father's excellencies, to imitate them, and draw a veil over his sins. Solomon refers to the goodness of God, not only to his father David, but also to himself as successor to the throne. Gratitude for past mercies is an excellent preparation for the reception of new benefactions. The search after the highest good should ever be pursued with a grateful remembrance of the good already possessed. God's favours are doubly sweet when transmitted to us through the hands of those who have gone before us. The way to get the entail perpetuated is to bless God that it has hitherto been preserved. 2. *Prayer for wisdom humbly recognizes personal incompetency.* "I am but a little child" (verse 7). Solomon, with graceful modesty and humility, feels and acknowledges his youth and inexperience. His exact age at this time is not known; he was probably not more than twenty years of age. Youth, which, as a rule, places freedom in lawlessness, needs before all things to ask God daily for an obedient heart. Those who are employed in public stations ought to be very sensible of the weight and importance of their work and their own insufficiency for it; and then they are qualified for divine conduct and instruction. Absalom, who was a fool, wished himself a judge; Solomon, who was a wise man, trembles at the undertaking, and suspects his own fitness for it. "I know not how to go out or come in"—to sway this massy sceptre, to rule this great people. An allusion to captains or shepherds, or, as some think, to a little child, who learneth of his mother to go out and come into the house.—*Trapp.* It is an idiomatic expression denoting the whole official conduct of a ruler before his people (compare Numb. xxvii. 17). The wisest men are most sensible of their own ignorance. 3. *Prayer for wisdom has special reference to the object for which it is to be practically exercised.* "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad" (verse 9). A monarch's sagacity in the administration of justice was calculated to make the most marked impression upon the popular mind, and likely to be most generally talked about throughout the land. This quality also came more home to the personal concerns of his subjects than any other, and was for that reason alone the more carefully regarded. The administration of justice was, in all ancient monarchies, as it is now in the East, a most important part of the royal duties and functions; and there is no quality more highly prized than that keen discernment in the royal judge which detects the clue of real evidence amidst conflicting testimony, or that ready tact which devises a test of truth where the evidence affords no clue to any grounds of decision.—*Kitto.* The true wisdom for which we have to ask God does not consist in manifold and great knowledge, but in that which enables us to

discern between good and bad, right and wrong, sin and duty, truth and falsehood, so as not to be misled in judging either of other's actions or of our own (Job xxviii. 28; James iii. 17; Eph. v. 17). This discernment is a fruit of our spiritual renewal (Rom. xii. 2).

III. That wisdom often includes inferior blessings (verse 13). The way to temporal blessings is to be indifferent to them. Solomon has wisdom because he asks for it, and wealth because he does not. God superadds riches and honour, and promises long life to enjoy them. A similar principle in the Divine government is enunciated by Christ—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 33). The greater blessing includes all lesser ones. "So doth God love a good choice, that He recompenses it with over giving. Had Solomon made wealth his boon, he had failed both of riches and wisdom; now he asks the best, and speeds of all. They are in a fair way of happiness who can pray well."—*Bishop Hall.* Riches and honour are then truly blessings when God bestows the wisdom and grace to improve them aright (Eccles. vii. 11).

IV. That the gift of wisdom is conditioned on personal obedience (verse 14). All the Divine promises are largely conditional. This wise king, whose reign began so auspiciously, failed to meet the conditions of long-continued prosperity. "No character in the sacred writings disappoints us more than the character of Solomon." As the condition was not observed (1 Kings xi. 1-8), the right to the promise of lengthened days was forfeited, and it was not fulfilled. Solomon can scarcely have been more than fifty-nine or sixty at his death. Length of days is the blessing in the right hand of Wisdom—typical of eternal life; but in her left hand are riches and honour (Prov. iii. 16).

V. That the gift of wisdom should be devoutly and joyously acknowledged (verse 15). 1. *In diligent attention to religious duties.* "He came to Jerusalem, and stood before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings." Solomon determined to inaugurate his reign by a grand religious ceremonial at each of the two holy places which at this time divided between them the reverence of the Jews. Having completed the religious services at Gibeon, where was the Tabernacle of the congregation, and where he had received the Divine blessing, he proceeds now to Jerusalem, and sacrifices before the Ark of the Covenant, which was in Mount Zion (2 Sam. vi. 12). This proceeding symbolized that coming hour when, under the greater than Solomon, all separation of tabernacle and ark would be for ever past, and the true worshippers would advance from a *cultus* that made locality a test, to find their great altar in the inner temple of the Spirit, and to worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John iv. 21-24). We should give God praise for all his gifts, and for the promise of gifts not yet realized. 2. *In promoting the happiness of others.* "And made a feast to all his servants." A great feast naturally followed on a large sacrifice of peace-offerings. In these the sacrificer always partook of the flesh of the victim, and he was commanded to call in to the feast the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (Deut. xiv. 29). We best employ the gifts of God by using them to increase the joy of those around us.

LESSONS:—1. *The highest blessings are secured only by importunate prayer.* 2. *To possess true wisdom is to possess all the essentials of happiness.*

THE DREAM OF SOLOMON.

Solomon was a great man—great in everything he did. When he sinned, great in sin; when he worshipped, great in worship. Good and evil strangely

met and battled in this man's life. He had a majestic intellect, an intellect whose every thought contained the wealth of a proverb; but he had great animal propensities too. The sea of passion within him was deep and warm, heaved in resistless waves, and its surges often swamped his reason and his conscience.

The passage before us is the record of a dream which this great man had one night at Gibeon, a place celebrated in the Old Testament, but not mentioned in the New, and whose geographical position cannot be determined with any certainty now. There are two things very noteworthy in this dream.

1. *The blending of the human and divine.* There is much that you can trace to Solomon's own mind in the nocturnal vision recorded here. *It seemed to be according to the measure of his capacity.* He was a large-minded man, and the dream is on a large scale. There is nothing mean or small about it. Pharaoh's dream was very inferior to this. He was a narrow, material-minded man, and he dreamed of oxen and of corn. The dream of the Midianitish soldier was a still more contemptible thing. A poor, uncultivated, small-minded soldier dreamed that which was in accordance with his capacity, about a barley cake. Solomon's great soul took within the ample range of its imagination the whole Jewish nation, the Eternal Ruler of the universe, the righteous providence of Heaven, and the everlasting principles of moral obligation. A small mind can never have large conceptions, either awake or asleep. The dimensions of a man's ideas will always be measured by his capacity. Flower-pots cannot grow the cedars of Labanon—they require depth of soil and sweep of area. It seemed to be also according *to the moral state of his mind.* The previous day he had been engaged in religious services. His whole nature seemed on fire with devotion. In the fourth verse we are told that at Gibeon he sacrificed no less than a thousand burnt offerings. A thousand cattle he offered in sacrifice to God in one act of devotion. If the amount of his sacrifice measured the extent of his religious ardour, his religious feelings on this occasion must have reached the highest point of elevation. It was natural, therefore, on the night of that day the religious element should be predominant. The dream is thoroughly religious. As the religious sentiment had flooded his nature in the day, it worked his imagination in the night. It is generally thus. Our dreams grow out of the waking thoughts that have most impressed us. Imagination in the stillness of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon us, brings these thoughts together, constructs them into a fabric often grotesque, strange, and thrilling. It seemed to be, moreover, according *to the strongest desire of his heart.* He had just been appointed king of Israel; he was inexperienced—not more, perhaps, than twenty years of age. The responsibility of governing a great country pressed heavily on his young heart, and filled him with solicitude. He felt that to take the place of his father David, and direct the destinies of Israel, he required that wisdom which God alone could bestow. This he earnestly desires. Our mental faculties are the servants of our desires; desires are the spirit in the wheels of the mental machine.

So far, we see the human in this dream; but the divine is manifestly here, too. The coherency, truthfulness, and sublimity of the religious thoughts, and the propriety of the spirit and language of the prayer that was offered, and the fulfilment of the Divine answer given in the actual history of Solomon, all show that there was a presiding Divinity in the dream. The other thing noteworthy in this dream is—

2. *The suggested conditions of successful prayer.* The prayer of his dream was, as we have said, answered in his actual history. He did receive a wisdom for ruling, and abundance of riches, and a splendour of dominion that have never been rivalled by any monarch on the earth. Now, what are the conditions of successful prayer which the dream suggests?

I. That effective prayer must be divinely authorized. At the beginning of the dream Solomon received an authority to pray: "*And God said, Ask what I shall give thee.*" Such an authority is evidently a necessary condition. Unless the Eternal gave us a warrant to address Him, our appeals would be impious and fruitless. Hell prays, prays earnestly and continuously, but it prays without Divine authority, and the supplications rebound with the force of a crushing despair. An all-important question arises here: Have we, the men of this age, a Divine authority for praying? If not, our appeals to Heaven are worse than idle breath. What saith the oracle? Hear its declarations on the point (Deut. iv. 29-40; 2 Chron vii. 13-14; Jer. xxxiii. 3; Isa. lxv. 24; Matt. vii. 7-11). Here, then, is sufficient authority. God says as truly to us now as he said to Solomon in his dream, "*Ask what I shall give you.*" 1. *This authority to call upon God in prayer agrees with our religious instincts.* Prayer in some form or other is the natural cry of the soul. The child in distress does not more naturally look to his fond parent for help, than the human soul in sore trouble and danger looks to the heavens for aid. The heathen mariners in that little vessel that was bearing Jonah to Tarshish, when the tempest lashed the sea into fury, and threatened their destruction, "cried every man unto his God." Even men who in theory deny the existence of a God, urged by this instinct, will cry to Him in danger. There are many striking instances of this on record. Take one or two. Volney, the celebrated infidel, was once in a storm at sea. Whilst the vessel was reeling and plunging with the fury of the elements, there was no man on board more frantic with terror, and more earnest in prayer to that God whose existence he impiously denied, than this Volney. "Oh, my God, my God!" said he, "what shall I do?" One of his companions on board, struck with the inconsistency of this man's appeal to heaven, said, "What! have you a God now?" To which he replied, "Oh, yes! oh, yes!" Voltaire, the brilliant Frenchman and the celebrated infidel, cried out, when the king of terrors confronted him, "Oh, Christ! oh, Jesus Christ!" Tom Paine, that bold, clever sceptic, who wrote the "Age of Reason," cried out in his last hours, "O Lord, help me! God, help me! Jesus Christ, help me! O Lord, help me!" &c. Yes, the instinct in the soul to call upon God when excited by imminent danger triumphs over the strongest logic and grandest theories of infidelity. It is to me no feeble collateral argument for the divinity of the Bible, that God does that which the soul in her most solemn mood craves for—authorizes prayer. 2. *This authority to call upon God in prayer is encouraging to our hope as sinners.* Oh! what should we, who are here involved in guilt, depravity, affliction, death, do were those heavens sealed above us, and there was no God to hear our prayer? Our condition would indeed be hopeless. But when we hear Him say to us, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee;" and again, "Ask what I shall give thee," we feel that we may obtain His help to raise us to virtue, dignity, and immortal bliss. It is this truth that makes the thought of Him even tolerable to us. The thought that He created the universe, that He sustains all existence, that He is the righteous Governor of all worlds, would overwhelm us with terror unless we believed that He answered prayers. That He hears prayer is a truth that gives to every aspect of His character an attraction to us as sinners.

II. That effective prayer must be earnestly spiritual. By this we mean that spiritual interest must reign supreme, that spiritual motives must be predominant. It was so now with Solomon in his prayer. What a *sense he had of the Invisible God!* The grandeur of kingdoms and the splendour of material worlds seem to have had no place in his spirit now. The Great God is the one grand object, in all the reality of His being, before him. He recognized Him as the Author of all the distinguishing virtues which his father David

possessed. "Thou hast showed," &c. He speaks to God as a present, personal, conscious existence, seeing him, knowing and feeling what he said in prayer. What a sense he had of the *importance of spiritual goodness* in reference to his royal father in prayer! The idea of his temporal glory was lost in the thought of his spiritual excellence. "He walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee." What a sense he had of the *Divine goodness!* He ascribed all that his father had to God. "Thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne." Much as he loved his father, he traced all his father's greatness to the goodness of God. What a sense he had of his *own insignificance!* "I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in." Humility is essential to true prayer. No one can feel himself in the presence of the Infinite without being overwhelmed with a sense of his *own insignificance.* Egotistic thoughts can no more live in the breath of prayer, than flakes of snow in a summer sun. What a sense he had of his own *responsibility!* "Thy servant is in the midst of thy people, which thou hast chosen; a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude." All this shows how *earnestly spiritual* his prayer was; and this earnest spirituality is an essential condition of effective prayer. When we pray, materialism must vanish from our minds as a cloud, and spiritual realities must rise in all their commanding importance. He that prays must feel that he has to do with one who is the original fountain of all kinds of good. He that prays must have the deepest humility, must feel as Abraham felt when wrestling for Sodom, that he is but dust and ashes. He that prays must deeply realize his responsibility, both to man and his Maker. All this spiritual earnestness is an essential condition of effective prayer.

III. That effective prayer must be thoroughly unselfish. "What he prayed for was, "an understanding heart;" and he prayed for that, not that it might serve his own interest, but in order, as he says, "to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad." And this speech, we are told, "pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing," &c. Mark, God answered his prayer; in fact, gave to him more than he sought, because he sought not the good for his own ends, but in order to enable him to serve others. What! it may be said, are we to forget self in prayer? Are we not to pray for spiritual and temporal good for ourselves? By all means. But seek the good for yourself, not mainly for the sake of yourself, but in order that thereby you may be qualified to serve your generation and your God. With this spirit Moses prayed, "Oh! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book." In this spirit Paul prayed, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." In this spirit Jesus prayed, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say, Father save me from this hour? but for this cause came I unto this hour." Such are the conditions of effective prayer suggested in this dream. There are, of course, other conditions that are not here suggested, such as faith in the mediation of Jesus Christ, for all true prayer must be offered up in his name.

In conclusion, do you ask why prayer is not answered now as in olden times? We read of wondrous things it did in ancient times, in the generations of old. Abraham prays, and the storm of fire and brimstone is borne up for a time on the breath of his intercession. Moses prays, and now we see the earth opening her mouth, and swallowing up religious impostors, and now the sea dividing and making a highway for the chosen race. The disciples pray in the upper room at Jerusalem, and the day of Pentecost comes showering blessings on the ages. In fact, the Old and New Testaments are full of the triumphs of prayer—prayer creating the rain and the drought; prayer clearing the mountains, and dividing the seas; prayer scattering armies, and awakening the

dead to life; prayer destroying the power of the burning fiery furnace, and sealing up the mouths of lions; prayer opening prison doors, and healing all manner of diseases. Nor have we been left in later times without striking examples of its power.—*Homilist.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 5. Sleep is like a state of death to the soul, wherein the senses are locked up, and the understanding and will deprived of the free exercise of their functions. And yet this is no impediment to God in communicating His will to mankind; for He has power not only to awaken our intellectual faculties, but to advance them above their ordinary measure of perception, even while the body is asleep (Job xxxiii. 14). God can approach the soul in many different ways when the body is in a state of rest and inactivity, can move and actuate it as He pleases; and when He is inclined to make a discovery of anything, can set such a lively representation of it before the understanding as shall prevent a man's doubting the reality of the vision (see *Calmet*). In the particular phase of sleep known in Scripture as "dream" or "vision," it may be that the mind was sometimes in possession of all its powers, and that only the body slumbered. That which engages us most when we are awake will even in sleep still be our employment.

God well knew what Solomon needed, but He bade him ask. 1. To show how negligent men are in praying for what is spiritual. 2. That He would only bestow His gifts in the ordinance of prayer. 3. That great personages might have an example of what they should ask of God above all others.

"Ask what I shall give thee." 1. A test-word, for as man wishes and prays, so does he show of whose spirit he is the child (Psalm cxxxix. 23). 2. A word of warning, for we not only may, but we should also ask for all which we have most at heart (Psalm xxxvii. 4).—*Lange.*

Verses 5-15. The prayer of Solomon. 1. Its contents (verses 6-9). 2. Its answer (verses 10-14). A dream like Solomon's does not happen when the day just past has been spent in revel and riot, in gross or in refined sin.—*Lange.*

Verse 9. Solomon's choice of wisdom. And now occurred one of those prophetic dreams which had already been the means of Divine communication in the time of Samuel Thrice in Solomon's life (at the three epochs of his rise, of his climax, of his fall) is such a warning recorded. This was the first. It was the choice offered to the youthful king on the threshold of life—the choice so often imagined in fiction, and actually presented in real life. "Ask what I shall give thee." The answer is the ideal answer of such a prince, burdened with the responsibility of his position. He remembered the high antecedents of his predecessor; he remembered his own youth and weakness; he remembered the vastness of his charge; he made the demand for the gift which he, of all the heroes of the ancient church, was the first to claim; he showed his wisdom by asking for wisdom; he became wise because he had set his heart upon it. This was to him the special aspect through which the Divine spirit was to be approached and grasped, and made to bear on the wants of men; not the highest, not the choice of David, not the choice of Isaiah, but still the choice of Solomon.—*Stanley.*

As it appears eventually that Solomon did some foolish and some mistaken things, it becomes a matter of interest to know wherein lay that wisdom with which he was supernaturally endowed. God giveth to him that hath. It was the previous possession of wisdom which qualified him for more. His wisdom is evinced by nothing more than his choice of wisdom beyond all other blessings, when the fruition of his wishes was offered to him in the vision at Gibeon.

The terms of his request indicate the nature of the wisdom he required. That Divine wisdom in spiritual things, that heart religion which the Jews sometimes denoted by this name, is not intended. With that he was not pre-eminently gifted; not more gifted, certainly, than his father David, hardly so much gifted. The wisdom which he craved was that of which he had already enough to be able to appreciate the value of its increase—practical wisdom, sagacity, clearness of judgment and intellect in the administration of justice and in the conduct of public affairs, with an aptitude for the acquisition and use of the higher branches of philosophical knowledge, natural and moral, which constituted the learning of his age. In the latter he excelled the most famous men of his time.—*Kitto.*

The terms translated "wise" and "understanding," both denote *practical* wisdom (see Gen. xli. 33-39; Deut. iv. 6; Prov. i. 2, &c.).

Verses 11-14. The granting of Solomon's prayer teaches and assures us—1. That God grants more than they request, over and above praying and understanding, to those who call upon Him with earnestness and for spiritual gifts (Eph. iii. 20; Matth. vi. 33). 2. That God gives to him upon whom He confers an office—that is, to one who does not rush into an office or calling, but is called thereto by God—the necessary understanding if he humbly seek it. Where there is wisdom there comes, indeed, also gold and silver (Prov. iii. 16), but not the reverse.—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 16-28.

The Judgment of Solomon.

The gifts of God are not permitted to remain long unused. He who bestows them finds ample opportunity for their employment. A case is speedily brought before Solomon which brings into exercise the faculty of wisdom with which he was supernaturally endowed; and his startling decision made a profound impression on the people, and added greatly to his reputation. The pattern-instance, as recorded in these verses, is, in all its features, thoroughly Oriental. Examples are recorded in ancient history of similar judicial penetration.—(See *Kitto, Dr. A. Clarke, Lange*). But the sagacity displayed by Solomon in the instance before us was most wonderful, and evinced to all that, though young in years, he was fully competent to fulfil the duties of the lofty position to which he was raised.

I. The judgment of Solomon was exercised on a case of peculiar difficulty. 1. *It was too difficult for ordinary tribunals to settle.* The case had, doubtless, been brought before a court where it was customary to hear and decide upon ordinary disputes and offences; but this was altogether beyond the capacity of the judge to settle. The final appeal must, therefore, be made to the king, and his judgment be irrevocable. There are questions sometimes brought before our law courts so involved and contradictory that the penetration of the ablest judge fails to detect the real transgressor, and the power of justice is for the time paralyzed. But the great Omniscient cannot be deceived; and the day is coming when He will reveal the secrets of all hearts, and redress the wrongs of the universe. 2. *The disputants were of questionable character.* "There came two women that were harlots"—persons of abandoned character. The word is also rendered *victuallers*, or *hostesses*. Perhaps they were both, though they could not be common harlots, for such would hardly have ventured into the presence of the king. One sin injures the whole character, and there are some sins which cast suspicion on the veracity of the transgressor, however solemn his asseverations. The value of testimony hinges on rectitude of personal

character. The greatest difficulties of our law judges arise from the unreliable nature of the evidence they have to sift. 3. *The testimonies were evenly balanced* (verse 22, 23). The stout affirmation of the one mother was met by the flat denial of the other. Their testimonies were of equal credit—*i.e.*, of none at all. As there was no evidence, it seemed impossible to arrive at any decision, and the whole court seemed held in suspense, and unable to tell which to believe. But Solomon was equal to the occasion, and had made up his mind how to solve the difficulty.

II. **The judgment of Solomon was successful by an appeal *to* maternal affection.** 1. *This appeal was sudden.* Every opportunity had been given to each woman to state her case. The king had patiently listened, and shown every disposition to administer equal justice. There was nothing more to say but what would be a repetition of what had been already said. A painful pause had come in the progress of the trial, when, as if moved by a sudden inspiration, the king speaks. The actions which have had the most important bearing on the destinies of individuals have often been the result of a spontaneous impulse. When truth is quickly apprehended it is wisest to act promptly. 2. *This appeal was apparently severe.* "And the king said, bring me a sword" (verse 24) Doubtless some of the wiser hearers smiled upon each other, and thought in themselves, What! will the young king cut these knotty causes in pieces? Will he divide justice with edged tools? Will he smite at hazard before conviction? There was a law concerning the dividing of a living ox and a dead one (Exod. xxi. 35); but that did not reach his case. The heart of kings is unsearchable (Prov. xxv. 3). That sword which had served for execution, shall now serve for trial. "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other." Oh! divine oracle of justice, commanding that which it would not have done, that it might find out that which could not be discovered? Neither God nor his deputies may be so taken at their words, as if they always intended their commands for action, and not sometimes for probation.—*Bp. Hall.* 3. *This appeal revealed a deep practical insight into human nature.* The mother's heart was touched, and, without the aid of argument and cross-examination, the great discovery was made. The yearning affection of the true mother for the child whose life was thus threatened stood out in prominent contrast to the cold, callous attitude of her adversary. The case is strikingly put by Bishop Hall:—This sword hath already pierced the breast of the true mother, and divided her heart with fear and grief at so killing a sentence: there needs no other rack to discover nature, and now she thinks—woe is me, that came for justice, and am answered with cruelty! "Divide ye the living child!" Alas! what hath that poor infant offended, that it survives, and is sued for? How much less miserable had I been that my child had been smothered in my sleep, than mangled before mine eyes! If a dead carcase could have satisfied me I need not to have complained! What a woeful condition am I fallen into, who am accused to be the death of my supposed child already, and now shall be the death of my own! If there were no loss of my child, yet how can I endure this torment of my own bowels? And while she thinks thus, she sues to that suspected mercy of her just judge—"Oh, my Lord, give her the living child, and slay him not!" as thinking, if he live, he shall but change a mother; if he die, his mother loseth a son: while he lives, it shall be my comfort that I have a son, though I may not call him so; dying, he perisheth to both. Contrarily, her envious competitor, as holding herself well satisfied that her neighbour should be as childless as herself, can say, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it." Well might Solomon and every hearer conclude, that either she was no mother, or a monster, that could be content with the murder of her child; and that, if she could have been the true mother, and yet have desired the blood of her infant, she had been as

worthy to have been stripped of her child for so foul unnaturalness, as the other had been worthy to enjoy him for her honest compassion. Not more justly than wisely, therefore, doth Solomon trace the true mother by the footsteps of love and pity; and adjudgeth the child to those bowels that had yearned at his danger.

III. **The judgment of Solomon won the respect and confidence of the people** (verse 28). The justice of the sentence made a deep impression upon the whole people. They saw that he judged impartially; that they could not impose on him; and they were afraid to do those things which might bring them before his judgment seat. They acknowledged the Divine source of his marvellous endowment. "They saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment." What was done to the other woman we are not told; justice certainly required that she should be punished for her lies and fraud. Wisdom strengtheneth the wise: it is better than weapons of war (Eccles. vii. 19; ix. 18). Good men reverence, and bad men stand in awe of, the wise.

LESSONS:—1. *To do justice is one of the most important duties of the sovereign.* 2. *Divine help is needed and should be sought in order wisely to discriminate between right and wrong.* 3. *The Divine justice is unerring, and all its decisions irrevocable.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 16-28. **Sin infallibly exposed.** 1. Notwithstanding the secrecy of its indulgence. 2. Notwithstanding the subtlety and ability of its defenders. 3. Notwithstanding the deceptive contradictions of its evidence.

Every part of the incident is characteristic. The two mothers, degraded as was their condition, came, as the Eastern stories so constantly tell of the humblest classes, to demand justice from the king. He patiently listens; the people stand by, wondering what the child-like sovereign will determine. The mother of the living child tells her tale with all the plaintiveness and particularity of truth, and describes how, as she "looked at him again and again, behold it was not my son which I did bear." The king determines, by throwing himself upon the instincts of nature, to cut asunder the sophistry of argument. The living child was to be divided, and the one half given to one, the other half to the other. The true mother betrays her affection: O, my Lord, give her the living *babe* (the word is peculiar), and in no wise slay it." The king repeats, word for word, the cry of the mother, as if questioning its meaning. "Give her the living *babe*, and in no wise slay it? then bursts forth into his own conviction: She is the mother."—*Stanley.*

Solomon's wise judgment. 1. The question in dispute (verses 16-22). 2. The decision (verses 23-28).—*Lisco.*

Verses 17-22. **Such sin brings together, but it unites only for a short time, for it produces discord, wrangling, and controversy. Abiding peace dwells only in the house where the God of peace binds hearts together. He who takes from the heart of a mother her child, or estranges or deprives her, will not escape the righteous tribunal of the judge to whom the mother calls and appeals. Litigation is generally associated with envy, falsehood, and unrighteousness; hence the Lord says, "Be ready," &c. (Matth. v. 25; Luke xii. 58).—*Lange.***

Verse 19. **The perils of infant life** 1. Arising from the ignorance and inexperience of those on whom it is dependent. 2. From its own fragile and defenceless condition. 3. From the consequences of others' sins. 4. Are avoided only by the mercy and protecting care of heaven.

Verses 25-27. **Even in morality it is thus also; truth as it is one, so it loves entireness; falsehood, division. Satan, that hath no right to the heart, would**

be content with a piece of it; God, that made it all, will have either the whole or none. The erroneous church strives with the true for the living child of saving doctrine; each claims it for her own; heresy, conscious of her own injustice, would be content to go away with a leg or an arm of sound principles, as hoping to make up the rest with her own mixtures; truth cannot abide to part with a joint, and will rather endure to lose all by violence than a piece through willing connivancy.—*Bishop Hall.*

Verse 26. If an immoral woman be merciful for the son of her body, and cannot forget her little child, how much more should every Christian mother be ready to offer, when necessary, the heaviest sacrifice to deliver her child from moral ruin. If in the hearts of sinners the love of father and mother be so strong, how strong must the fatherly love of God be (Isaiah xlix. 15)! Envy hardens all human feeling, and makes one hard and heartless.

Verses 27, 28. When a child, apparently given over to death, is restored to its parents by Divine providence, so much the more must their chief solicitude be to educate and bring it up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Not power and force; not great pomp, and pride, and tyranny; but wisdom and righteousness give to the government authority, and call forth genuine fear and the voluntary obedience of the people. If it were given to a Solomon to bring to disgrace lying and misrepresentation by judicial wisdom and knowledge of the human heart, and to deliver a righteous judgment, how much less shall liars and hypocrites stand up under the tribunal of Him who could say, "A greater than Solomon is here!" who, without needing witnesses and judicial examination, will bring to light what is hidden in darkness (1 Cor. iv. 5), and before whose judgment seat we must all appear (2 Cor. v. 10)?—*Lange.*

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE HEBREW EMPIRE.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—The list of officers in Solomon's kingdom (verses 2-19) seems to have been inserted without belonging to the narrative; for verse 1 connects itself naturally with verse 20, and the record moves on consecutively. The list supplies internal evidence that it belongs to the later period of Solomon's reign, and not to this early portion of his career; for it includes two officers who had *daughters of Solomon* for their wives (verses 11 and 15). Probably it is a record of the most distinguished officers of the kingdom during the whole reign. Appropriately inserted here, as showing how well ordered and flourishing the kingdom was: managed by civil officers of different degrees of dignity in the realm. Verse 1. **King over all Israel**, inclusive of Judah. Verse 2. **Azariah, the priest,** הַכֹּהֵן. Not a sacerdotal office, but secular; כֹּהֵן describes a secular office in 2 Sam. viii. 18; xx. 26; and כֹּהֵן is used of "Zabud" (verse 5, called "principal officer"); and of these highest state dignitaries Azariah was chief. The word thus denotes an officer answering to prime minister, or chief of the privy counsellors, the first in the state next the king. Verse 3. **Scribes**—Secretaries of state. **Recorder**—Historiographer or chronicler (the same officer was under David, 2 Sam. viii. 16): in all oriental kingdoms, ancient and modern, this officer is of first rank. Verse 4. **Benaiah, over the host**, formerly captain of the guard, now succeeded Joab as commander of the forces. *Zadok and Abiathar* were *the priests*: the former alone discharged the functions of the sacerdotal office, the latter was banished (ii. 26), and retained office only *in nomine*. Verse 5. **Over the officers**: *i.e.*, the prefects, or provincial governors (verse 7). **Principal officers**—כֹּהֵן, probably means a privy counsellor. **And friend of the king**: *i.e.*, his confidential friend or favourite. This attachment of Solomon to the sons of Nathan is natural and honourable, considering what service Nathan had rendered him (chap. i., ii. 22 *sq*). Verse 6. **Over the household**—Steward or chamberlain of the palace,

master of the household. The tribute: הַמַּס, the levy, or labourers (comp. v. 13-14) overseer of the hirelings who were employed to maintain the splendour of Solomon's court Verses 17-19. Twelve officers—Governors of territories allotted to their oversight, entrusted with securing the royal revenues. The division of the land into twelve sections was not according to the boundaries of the tribes, but the fertility of the land. The returns from these districts were made, not in cash, but in the produce of the soil. Each district sent supplies for a month, and the twelve in succession completed the year. Verse 20. As the sand which is by the sea—This shows the promise to Abraham (Gen. xxii. 17; xxxii. 13) fulfilled. Eating, drinking, and making merry suggests the contentment and social prosperity of the people. Verse 21. From the river unto the land—The word "unto" is supplied; but instead of עַד *unto*, בְּ might be understood, *over*, thus: "From the river (Euphrates), over the land of the Philistines," &c. "Brought *presents*," means tribute. All the petty kingdoms from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean acknowledged the Hebrew monarchy. Verse 22. Solomon's provision for one day: *i.e.*, for the king's table, the court, principal officers, foreign visitors, &c. "The quantity of fine flour used is estimated at 240 bushels; that of meal or common flour at 480. The number of cattle required for consumption, besides poultry and several kinds of game, which were got in abundance on the mountains, did not exceed in proportion what is needed in other courts of the East" (Dr. Jamieson). "Ten fattened oxen, twenty from the pastures, and one hundred sheep," &c. (verse 23). Verse 24. From Tiphsah: *i.e.*, Thapsacus, a large town on the west bank of the Euphrates. Even to Azzah *i.e.*, Gaza, on the extreme south-west, about ten miles from the Mediterranean. Verse 25. Under vine and fig tree—A beautiful metaphor for security and comfort. Verse 26. And 12,000 horsemen—Not horsemen, riders; but פָּרָשִׁים saddle-horses, as in contrast with harness-horses. These chariot and saddle horses Solomon kept partly in Jerusalem, and partly in other towns (x. 26; 2 Chronicles i. 14; ix. 25). Verse 28. Dromedaries—The fleet one-humped camel. Verse 29. Wisdom and understanding exceeding much—High powers of mind, and sharpness of perception. Largeness of heart—רְחַב לֵב, amplitude of soul, capacity for receiving and communicating knowledge; for the "heart" with the Hebrews stood for capacities of the soul. Verse 30. Children of the East Country—Arabians, Chaldeans, and Persians (Genesis xxv. 6). Opposite these in the West was Egypt, whose fame for wisdom was throughout the ancient world (Isaiah xix. 11; Acts vii. 22). Verse 31. Ethan, the Ezrahite—Of the Levitical family of Merari (1 Chron. vi. 14); president of the music in David's tabernacle (1 Chronicles xv. 17 19), and composer of Psalm lxxxix. Heman—A chief of the tabernacle musicians, and the king's seer (1 Chronicles xxv. 5), a son of Joel. Chalcol and Darda, sons of Machol—Unknown. The Rabbinical book *Seder Olam* says, "These were prophets that prophesied in Egypt," but all is uncertain. Verse 32. Proverbs—מָשָׁל denotes epigrammatic sentences, pithy and witty sayings holding moral sentiments and wise observations on human life and character. Songs—Of these we possess only Psalms lxxii., cxxxii., probably cxxvii., and the Canticles. How few of these lavish creations of his capacious mind survive the destructive work of Time! The *Koran* praises him as conversant with the languages of men and demons, birds and ants, with all of whom he had intercourse. The whole of the occult learning in the East is still associated with his name.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-28.

Prominent Features of National Prosperity.

The author of the Books of Kings, true to the religious intention of the history, gives but a scanty description of the external magnificence of the Israelitish kingdom in its palmiest days. But the list of names, and brief allusions contained in this chapter, present glimpses of the glory and affluence of that period. "The general tone of the records of Solomon's reign is that of jubilant delight, as though it were, indeed, a golden day following on the iron and brazen age of the warlike David and his half-civilized predecessors. The heart of the poets of the age overflows with the beautiful words of loyal delight (Psa. xlv.). The royal justice and benevolence are like the welcome showers in the thirsty East. The poor, for once, are cared for. The very tops of the

bare mountains seem to wave with corn, as on the fertile slopes of Lebanon" (Psa. lxxii. 2, 5, 6, 7, 13, 16). We have in the brief descriptions of this paragraph a portrayal of *the prominent features of national prosperity*, as illustrated more or less in the history of all nations.

I. The unity and submission of the whole nation to the reigning monarch. "So king Solomon was king over all Israel. And reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt; they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life" (verses 1, 21). Solomon was the only Hebrew monarch who ever governed for his whole lifetime so vast a territory. David for seven years ruled but a single tribe; and at the beginning of the reign of Solomon's successor the kingdom was rent asunder by the revolt of the ten tribes, as the result of one churlish breath. The subject kingdoms, doubtless, preserved their separate organization and nationality, as when independent, but were ever ready both to contribute to the annual revenues of Solomon, and also to furnish, when occasion offered, their quota of men for any public service. The organization of a great empire into provinces, ruled by governors holding office at the pleasure of the crown, was a discovery of Darius Hystaspis. The time is hastening when all nations will be united in one grand confederation under the sceptre of Messiah (Psa. lxxii.; Isaiah lx. 5-11).

II. The splendour and order of the court (verses 1-19, 26-28). The period of the Judges was the time of public crudeness in which there was an absence of order and of organic unity of the kingdom. The age of David was that of continuous wars and battles, in which, indeed, victory over all enemies at last came, and with it, at the same time, the beginning of a well-ordered condition, but not complete peace for the kingdom. This first came with Solomon's reign (1 Chron. xxii. 8, 9). The reign of Solomon is the result of all preceding conflicts and Divine teachings. It is the kingdom of Israel in its highest maturity. —*Lange*. The catalogue of names probably contains those of the most distinguished officers which during the whole reign of Solomon, or at least during its most flourishing period, helped to add lustre and dignity to his administration. The officers of the court were generally the same as those of David's time. The great officers are now, for the first time, called by one general name—princes—a title which before had been almost confined to Joab; these officers of the first rank deriving their station from Solomon, and probably holding it during pleasure. The union of priestly and secular functions still continued. The prophets cease to figure among the dignitaries, as though the prophetical office had been overborne by the royal dignity. The chief-priesthood was concentrated in Zadok alone, though Abiathar, notwithstanding his deposition (ch. ii. 27), continued to hold his priestly dignity and character, so that when he no longer executed the duties of his office his name remained on the official list. The three military bodies seem to have remained unchanged. The commander of the host is the priestly warrior Benaiah. The guard appear only as household troops, employed on state pageants. A number of inferior officers was appointed, under a principal officer, the greater part of whom had to control the taskwork exacted from the Canaanite population, and the remainder, consisting of twelve chiefs, had to be responsible for provisioning the royal household. The court was a scene of magnificence and gaiety, thronged with richly-apparelled attendants, and sparkling with evidences of boundless wealth. In the midst of this gorgeous array stood the stately figure of the king—fair in countenance, and resplendent in beauty—his robes scented with the perfumes of India, the crown on his head and the sceptre in his hand, and the guards and councillors surrounding his brilliant throne: or, as was often the case, the king, at early dawn, is driving out of Jerusalem in one of his numerous chariots, drawn by horses of unparalleled swiftness and beauty, himself clothed

in white, followed by a train of mounted archers, all splendid youths of magnificent stature, dressed in purple, their long black hair flowing behind them, powdered with gold-dust, which glittered in the sun as they galloped along after their royal master.—(*Josephus, Stanley passim.*) A wealthier grandeur than that of the greatest earthly empire rests upon the throne of the Great Redeemer: His officers are the most gifted, and most numerous; His government is orderly and beneficent.

III. The vast increase of population (verse 20). "As the sand which is by the sea in multitude," a proverbial and hyperbolical expression, commonly used in all languages. Thus was fulfilled the promise made to Abraham (Gen. xiii. 16; xxii. 17; see also ch. iii. 8; and compare Psalm cxxvii., which is traditionally ascribed to Solomon, and which celebrates the populousness and security of Israel in his day). A healthy and increasing population is an important evidence of national prosperity, an honour to the prince, and a terror to his enemies (Prov. xiv. 28). The people of God—His spiritual Israel—are innumerable (Rev. vii. 9).

> What a countless company
> Stand before yon dazzling throne!

IV. The ample supply of provisions (verses 22, 23, 27, 28). The daily provision for Solomon's table was sufficient to serve, at two pounds of bread each, besides meat, no less than 29,160 men. Thenius computes the number daily fed at the palace of the Israelitish king to be 14,000. It is said that one hundred oxen were daily slaughtered for the kings of Persia, and that 15,000 persons have been daily fed at the court. And Tavernier relates that as many as five hundred sheep and lambs were daily consumed at the court of the Sultan, besides a number of fowls, and an immense quantity of butter and rice. No nation can boast of prosperity when its people are starved and famine prevails. When we consider how closely population follows on the heels of production, how great is the goodness of God in ensuring a constant supply of food for man and beast! He who is greater than Solomon feeds a more numerous household, not only with the bread that perisheth, but with that which endureth to everlasting life.

V. The universal prevalence of peace. "He had peace on all sides round about him" (verse 24). Wherein also he became a lively type of Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isa. ix. 6), who as he was brought from heaven with that song of peace (Luke ii. 14), so he returned up again with that farewell of peace (Jno. xiv. 27), leaving to the world the doctrine of peace, the gospel of peace (Eph. ii. 17); which worketh that peace which passeth understanding (Phil. iv. 7).—*Trapp.*

VI. The conscious security and happiness of the people (verses 20, 25). They were cheerful in their enjoyment of abounding plenty—eating, drinking, and making merry—evidences these of a happy, peaceful, and prosperous administration. Every man dwelt safely "under his vine," that clustered round his court; "and under his fig tree," which grew in his garden. They were no longer obliged to dwell in fortified cites for fear of their enemies; they spread themselves over all the country, which they everywhere cultivated; and had always the privilege of eating the fruits of their own labours. In this was typified the spiritual peace and joy and holy security of all the faithful subjects of Messiah's kingdom. "It must be regarded as an unspeakable blessing of God, when, under the protection of a wise and righteous government, everyone in the nation, even the least, can remain in the undisturbed possession

of his property, and can enjoy the fruits of his industry in the bosom of his family."

LESSONS :—1. *National prosperity is the gift of God.* 2. *Is fraught with many dangers.* 3. *Is permanent only when used for the highest religious welfare of the people.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Chap. iv. **The kingdom of Solomon a type of the Messiah's.** 1. In its greatness and extent. 2. In its prosperity and peace. 3. In his wisdom and knowledge. Fortunate is the government where all goes orderly. Their eyes shall look around after the faithful in the land, and pious subjects are loved and esteemed; but false people and liars, and those of a perverse heart, who have proud ways and haughtiness, and who calumniate others secretly and maliciously, it will not endure nor have about it; but will clear away and destroy after the example of David (Psalm cx.). A well-ordered state constitution is the condition of the growth and prosperity of every kingdom; but all ordinances and institutions avail nothing when requisite and proper persons are wanting for their administration and execution. To select such, and to entrust them with different administrative offices, is the first and most difficult task of a ruler. Happy the prince to whom God grants the grace to find the right persons, who can counsel him and deserve his confidence (Eccles. x. 2-5). As a court, where it is beset with flatterers, backbiters, carousers, &c., generally goes down, so also it prospers, on the other hand, when pious servants are there.

Verses 4, 5. Compare 1 Chron. xxii. 7-10. David, the man of action; Solomon, the man of rest. The man of active life usually has more conspicuous virtues and more conspicuous faults than the man of rest. David proposed to build the house—the man of action was the founder; Solomon carried the plans of his father into execution. David was the founder; Solomon the builder.

Verse 20. Not the multitude of a people causes a scarcity in the land, but the wickedness and avarice of men. Food and drink and amusement are a gift of God (Eccles. iii. 13), when used in the fear of God (Eccles. xi. 9) and with thanksgiving (1 Cor. x. 31; Col. iii. 17); but they become sin when, in the gift, the Giver is forgotten, the belly made a god of, and serves the lust of the flesh.

Verse 21. The kingdom of Christ is still far greater. He rules from one end of the sea to the other, from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof (Zach. ix. 10). All kings shall call upon Him: all the heathen shall serve Him (Psalm lxxii. 8-10).

Verse 22. As by Divine providence and ordering there are always different conditions, high and low, rich and poor, so their manner of life cannot be the same, but must be conformable to the rank and position which have been assigned to every one by God. The household of a prince who stands at the head of a great and distinguished people ought not, indeed, to give to the people the bad example of extravagant show, luxury, and riot; but it must, in abundance and splendour, surpass every private establishment, and ought not to appear needy and impoverished.

Verse 24, 25. **The blessings of peace.** 1. Wherein they consist. 2. To what they oblige. Peace nourishes, disturbance consumes. Only in peace, not in war, does a nation attain to well-being; therefore should we offer prayer and supplication for kings and all in authority, &c. (1 Tim. ii. 2). Happy the land where goodness and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other (Psalm lxxxv. 10).—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 29-34.

THE UNIQUE WISDOM OF SOLOMON.

I. It was vast in its range and profound in its insight (verse 29). The terms of this verse indicate that Solomon was gifted as a man of profound thought, of deep understanding, with vast powers of judgment, and a broad and diversified experience. *Largeness of heart* is intended to convey the idea of great intellectual capacity. In Scripture the heart is often used for the intellect. The expression, *as the sand that is on the sea shore*, was proverbial in reference to numerical multitude (Gen. xxii. 17; xxxii. 12; xli. 49; Josh. xi. 4; Judg. vii. 12; 1 Sam. xiii. 5; 2 Sam. xvii. 11; 1 Kings iv. 20; Psalm lxxviii. 27). It is used here to denote the amplitude and multiplicity of the knowledge and wisdom of Israel's greatest king. It was said of a certain great man that he was a very gulph of learning; of another, that he was a closet or market of all sciences and learning; of another, that he was skilful in everything; and of a fourth, that he might be said to know all that was knowable. All these eulogies might be fitly applied to Solomon. His wisdom was not only vast in extent, but, like the sea-sand, minute and accurate in detail. As the sand upon the sea-shore, observes Lord Bacon, incloses a great body of water, so Solomon's mind contained an ocean of knowledge. Intellectual endowments are better than wealth (Prov. iii. 13, 14), better than long life (*ib.* iii. 2), better than the uncertain prizes of worldly honour (*ib.* iii. 16). But there is a wisdom deeper, vaster, and more satisfying than that of Solomon's, and which can be learned only at the feet of Him who is greater than Solomon, and "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The mere child of faith is wiser than the most profoundly intellectual unbeliever. The wisdom of Solomon gave no peace to his restless mind, did not prolong his days, and did not prevent his falling into grievous sins. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, &c. (Jas. iii. 17). The life of man is short; but the glory that blooms upon it—the outburst and glitter of intellectual genius—is shorter still. But they that be wise—wise in the truest and highest sense—are invested with an undying and celestial radiance—"they shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars for ever and ever."

II. It surpassed the wisdom of the best known philosophers (verses 30, 31). The East is the cradle of the sciences, and in Solomon's day was the only part of the world famous for wisdom. The children of the East country would embrace the Chaldeans and Arabians, both of whom were distinguished for scientific research, and as the authors of sage and sententious utterances, which became proverbial. The wisdom of Egypt held a high position in the ancient world, and was varied and extensive in its character. It included magic, geometry, medicine, astronomy, architecture, and a dreamy mystic philosophy, of which metempsychosis was the main principle. The Egyptians despised the Greeks as only children in knowledge: and, indeed, the Greak learning only commenced four hundred years after the era of Solomon. It is not certain whether the philosphers mentioned in verse 31 were contemporaries of Solomon, or men of a more ancient time, whose fame for wisdom was still celebrated. When compared with the best known philosophers of his own and all former time, Solomon is declared to be supreme in wisdom. The knowledge which is divinely bestowed is superior to that which is acquired as the result of human labour: grace is more potent than art. To possess a wealth of wisdom involves a solemn responsibility. Woe be to that man who prostitutes God-given talent to base and ignoble purposes! The abuse of wisdom will only make the transgressor more exquisitely alive to the misery he draws upon himself. True wisdom exalts the possessor, and blesses the race.

III. It enriched the practical and poetic literature of the ages (verse 32). Of these three thousand proverbs a very valuable though a comparatively small portion remains in the book of Proverbs, and, perhaps, also in Ecclesiastes. The remark that he *spake* these proverbs may imply that they were not all written, or actually recorded, and so far from being preserved only by oral tradition, they either became gradually lost, or their authorship became uncertain. Being the son of the greatest of human lyrists, the sweet psalmist of Israel, Solomon naturally inherited the gift of poetry and song. Of the thousand and five songs, there now remain, probably, the lxxii. and cxxvii. Psalms, and the Canticles, though the authorship of the latter is a controverted question. But though most of the proverbs and songs of Solomon are lost to us, their silent influences, flowing through unseen channels, may have greatly affected both the ancient and modern literature of the East, and may still be studied in the apocryphal books of Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon.—*Whedon.* The man who adds one really good book to the already wealthy literature of the world is a benefactor to mankind. When preferment was offered to Thomas Aquinas, he was wont to sigh and say, "I would rather have Chrysostom's Comment on Matthew." A pure and healthy literature is a mighty force in shaping individual and public opinion, in consolidating moral character, in defining and directing the career of a nation, in exposing time-honoured fallacies, and in promoting the highest ends of truth and righteousness. On the other hand, who can estimate the pernicious influence of a single bad book? It is lamentable to observe how the loftiest genius is employed in teaching downright immorality, and shattering the faith of man in the supreme good. Truth is sacrificed for effect, and purity for a temporary bubble reputation. The monetary gain of a vile book soon vanishes, but the mischief remains long after the cunning hand of the writer has turned to dust. Many would have sacrificed all they possessed to be able to undo the evil their own pens produced.

IV. It embraced a minute acquaintance with the principal subjects of natural history (verse 33). This is the first idea of a complete system of natural history as far as it includes the animal and vegetable kingdoms; and Solomon was probably the first natural philosopher in the world. His knowledge ranged from the most gigantic trees to the humblest plant; from mammoths to insects. The writings of Solomon bear evidence of his keen appreciation of the beauties of nature, and of the habit of minute observation and sage reflection. His extended commerce with other nations afforded him ample opportunity for becoming acquainted with rare and varied specimens of plants and animals. His discourse would consist not simply in scientific description and analysis, but in tracing evidences of Divine skill and power. Unlike some inflated scientists of the present day, his profound knowledge of the mysteries of nature did not obscure, but brighten and expand, his conceptions of the Divine. Irenaeus observes that Solomon expounded psychologically the wisdom of God which is manifest in creation. And Josephus states, "*He spake a parable* upon every sort of tree, from the hyssop to the cedar; and in like manner, also, about beasts and all sorts of living creatures, whether upon the earth, in the seas, or in the air; for he was not unacquainted with any of their natures, nor omitted inquiries about them, but described them all *like a philosopher*, and demonstrated his exquisite knowledge of their several properties." It is the function of science to interpret nature; and the record of its triumphs in recent years reads like the pages of a thrilling romance. But alongside the growth and expansion of science there has grown up an unhealthy and dangerous scepticism. This has been more especially evident when one branch of the great family of the sciences has been the exclusive object of study, for then the flow of thought becomes narrowed in its channel,

the range of vision limited, and the harmony of truth, which lies not so much in one thing as it pervades all, is seriously disturbed. The sublime object of all true science is to interpret and illustrate the highest truth, and aid the anxious inquirer in its attainment. There is something overpoweringly affecting in contemplating a gifted human soul, baffled in its unaided search after truth, and drifting, ever drifting, like a lonely raft on a shoreless sea. The invariable result of the kind of scepticism which certain doctrines of modern science has helped to create is to plunge the mind into greater doubts than those from which it professes to liberate; but it is the office of a genuine philosophy—a Christianized science—to bring the light that dispels the gloom and guides the distraught inquirer into hallowed rest and peace.

V. It acquired a universal reputation. "His fame was in all nations round about" (verses 31, 34). Solomon was the Aristotle of the Jewish nation; but his fame excelled that of the Grecian sage, and is to-day familiar with thousands to whom the name of Aristotle is unknown. Solomon not only continued to be the type and model of all wisdom to his own people, but in the East is so regarded to the present day. The Koran praises him as knowing the languages of men and demons, of birds and ants, with all of which, it is said, he held intercourse. The Turks still possess a work of seventy folio volumes which is called the Book of Solomon. The occult wisdom of the East is still connected with his name. His court was a centre round which gathered the great and learned of all nations, who were attracted either by curiosity, or with a desire to add to their stores of wisdom (verse 34). It is not always the good fortune of the wise to attain a wide-spread popularity. The highly talented often pine in obscurity (Eccles. ix. 13-16). Messiah is the embodiment of a wisdom infinitely surpassing that of Solomon (Prov. viii. 22, 23; Col. ii. 3). His reputation is the most exalted, and is imperishable (Phil. ii. 9; Ps. lxxii. 17); they who would be wise unto salvation must come to Him (1 Cor. i. 30). The perpetuity and blessedness of true wisdom are best ensured by imparting it to others.

LESSONS.—1. *We are again reminded that superior wisdom is the gift of God* (verse 29). 2. *Uncommon abilities increase the responsibility to use them with uncommon diligence for the glory of the Donor.* 3. *The wisdom of the few should be diffused for the instruction of the many.* 4. *He who is wise unto salvation, and wise to win souls, acquires an undying reputation.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses **29-34. The wisdom of Solomon.** 1. Its Divine origin (verse 29). 2. Its vastness (verse 29). 3. Its superlative excellency (verses 30, 31). 4. Its marvellous productiveness (verse 32). 5. Its practical utility (verse 33). 6. Its irresistible attractiveness (verse 34).

— **Solomon a type of Christ.** 1. As the child of promise. 2. As consecrated to the regal office. 3. Though ready to spare, as finally destroying every obstinate rebel against his government. 4. In the tranquillity and equity of his reign. 5. As the builder of the Temple of the Lord. 6. As possessed of extraordinary wisdom. 7. As attracting all ranks to resort to him (Psalm xlv. 12; lx. 6).—*Robinson.*

Verse 29. Not every one receives from God an equal measure of spiritual endowment, but every one is obliged with the gift he has received to dispose of it faithfully, and not allow it to be fallow (Luke xii. 48; Matt. xxv. 14-29). In the possession of high spiritual endowment, and of much knowledge, man is in danger of overestimating himself, of becoming proud and haughty; hence the highly gifted Solomon himself says, "Trust in the Lord," &c. (Prov. iii. 5, 6).—*Lange.*

Verses 30, 31. **The responsibility of intellectual greatness.** 1. Intellectual greatness should be distinguished by eminent goodness. 2. Is exposed to many subtle temptations. 3. Is powerful in exerting a beneficent or malevolent influence upon the age. 4. Is all the more lamentable in its fall.

Verse 30. **Heathen wisdom,** great as it may be in earthly things, understands nothing of divine, heavenly things, and is therefore far below the wisdom whose beginning is the fear of the personal, living God, who has revealed Himself in His Word. This wisdom alone yields true, good, and abiding fruit (James iii. 15-17).—*Lange.*

Verse 31. With the accession of Solomon a new world of thought was opened to the Israelites. The curtain which divided them from the surrounding nations was suddenly rent asunder. The wonders of Egypt, the commerce of Tyre, the romance of Arabia—nay, it is even possible, the Homeric age of Greece—became visible. Of this, the first and most obvious result was the growth of architecture. But the general effects on the whole mind of the people must have been greater still. A new direction seems to have been given to Israelite thought. Prophets and psalmists retire into the background, and their place is taken by the new power called by the name of "Wisdom." Its two conspicuous examples are the wisdom of Egypt and the wisdom of the Children of the East—that is, of the Idumæan Arabs. Four renowned sages appear as its exponents: Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol. It would almost seem as if a kind of college had been founded for this special purpose—a house of wisdom on seven pillars. A class of men sprang up, distinct both from priest and prophet, under the name of "the wise." Their teaching, their manner of life, was unlike that of either of those two powerful orders. The thing and the name had been almost unknown before. In a restricted sense, the word had been used of the Danite architects of the Tabernacle, and in a somewhat larger sense of two or three remarkable persons in David's reign. But from this time forward the word occurs in the sacred writings at least three hundred times. What it was will best be perceived by seeing it in its greatest representative. A change must have come over the nation, any way, through the new world which he opened. But it was fixed and magnified by finding such a mind to receive it. His wisdom excelled the wisdom of any one of his time. From his early years its germs had been recognized.—*Stanley.*

Verses 32, 33. **A pure literature.** 1. Embalms the best thoughts of the wise and good of all times and all lands. 2. Is of unspeakable value in the formation of moral character. 3. Deals with every phase of scientific truth. 4. Should be widely disseminated.—The glory which is obtained in the world through bad books is shame and disgrace before Him who demands account of every idle word.

Verse 32. It is, we might say, an accident that the Proverbs of Solomon are not called the "Parables," and that the teachings of the New Testament are called the "Parables," and not the "Proverbs," of the Gospels. The illustrations from natural objects, the selection of the homelier instead of the grander of these, are not derived from the prophets or from the psalmists, but from the wise naturalist, "who spake of trees, and beasts, and fowls, and creeping things, and fishes, of the singing birds, of the budding fig tree, of the fragrant vine." The teaching of Solomon is the sanctification of common sense in the Old Testament, and to that sanctification the final seal is set by the adoption of the same style and thought in the New Testament by Him who, with His apostles, taught in "Solomon's porch," and expressly compared His wisdom to the wisdom which gathered the nations round Solomon of old.—*Stanley.*

Verse 33. Far better would it befit lords and princes to find their enjoyment in study rather than to seek satisfaction in dramas, plays, and in immoderate drinking. A man may be able to speak of all possible things, and at the same time be without wisdom, for this does not consist in varied knowledge and wide-spread acquirements, but in recognition of the truth which purifies the heart and sanctifies the will. Observation and investigation of nature is only of the right kind and fraught with blessing when it leads to the confessions of Psalms civ. 24; xcii. 6, 7.—*Starke.*

— Solomon was, at least in one great branch, the founder, the only representative, not merely of Hebrew wisdom, but of Hebrew science. As Alexander's conquests had supplied the materials for the first natural history of Greece, so Solomon's commerce did the like for the first natural history of Israel. He spake of trees from the highest to the lowest, "from the spreading cedar of Lebanon to the slender caper-plant that springs out of the crevice of the wall." He spake also of beasts, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes. We must look at him as the first great naturalist of the world, in the midst of the strange animals—the apes, the peacocks—which he had collected from India; in the garden, among the copious springs of Etham, or in the bed of the deep ravine beneath the wall of his newly erected temple, where, doubtless, was to be seen the transplanted cedar, superseding the humble sycamore of Palestine; the paradise of rare plants, gathered from far and near; "pomegranates with pleasant fruits, camphire with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calermus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices."—*Stanley.*

Verse 34. The fascination of learning. 1. Appeals to the inquisitive instinct of man. 2. Stimulates its votary to still higher achievements. 3. Creates and strengthens a community of sympathy among minds of varying capacity. 4. Elevates the successful competitor to a pinnacle of enduring fame.

— To Solomon came from all nations people to hearken to his wisdom; but to Him who is greater than Solomon the wise men of to-day will not listen (1 Cor. i. 19-21). How many travel over land and sea to seek gold and silver, but stir neither hand nor foot to find the wisdom and knowledge of the truth which lie close at hand, and are better than gold and silver (Prov. viii. 11; xxiv. 14; Job xxviii. 18)!—*Lange.*

CHAPTER V.

NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE TYRIAN KING.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Hiram, king of Tyre, called *Hirom* (verses 7 and 19), *Huram* (2 Chron. ii. 3), and by Josephus Ἴρωμος, the same who had sent David timbers for his palace (2 Sam. v. 11; 1 Chron. xiv. 1). This embassy to Solomon was a declaration that he desired to maintain equally friendly relations with David's successor. Solomon took the incident as an opportunity to negociate for "cedar trees out of Lebanon" (verse 6) with which to build the temple. Verse 3. Wars which were about him on every side—David was not prevented from erecting God's temple because wars allowed him no leisure (see 2 Sam. vii. 1, "Lord had given him rest," &c.); he was free from military claims to do this work, but not free from military *stains;* his had been a career of war, and Jehovah's temple must be reared by one who should prefigure the "Prince of Peace" (*cf.* 1 Chron. xxviii. 3). *Note:* Solomon assumes that *Hiram knew David's intention* to build the temple (*cf.* 1 Chron. xxii. 1-4). Verse 4. Neither adversary nor evil occurrent—פֶּגַע רָע means an unhappy event, *e.g.*, plague, rebellion, famine. David had such "evil occurrent" in Absalom's rebellion, and in the plague following his numbering the people. Verse 6. Cedar trees out of Lebanon—Only from the forests of Lebanon could Solomon have procured such timber for the temple. These forests belonged to the Phœnicians, who carried on extensive trade in both cedars

and cypresses. The best cedars grew on the north-west of the mountain range. The *Sidonians* were at this time expert shipbuilders and good navigators; it would, therefore, be an easy part of their contract to "convey by sea" their merchandize (verse 9). *Robinson* says the famous cedar forests lie two days' journey north of Beirut, near the highest mountain peak, distant from Jebul Sunnin six or eight hours north. Verse 7. Hiram said, Blessed be the LORD—The Septuagint here reads Θεός, not Κύριος; yet this recognition of JEHOVAH might indicate in Hiram nothing more than a polytheistic acceptance of the God of Israel as one of many deities. In the parallel passage (2 Chron. ii. 12) Hiram calls him יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *Jehovah, God of Israel*, and adds, "*that made heaven and earth.*" Yet this may only imply his assent to the religious views of the Israelites. Verse 8. Cedar and fir—בְּרוֹשׁ more probably denotes the *cypress*, not "fir," although the pine, larch, and cypress are all found at this day in the Lebanon; and by *berosh* may be intended either tree. Verse 9. Convey them by sea in floats—*lit.*, I will make them into floats on the sea. Thus they could be brought down the river, probably the Dog River, to the sea coast, and by sea to Joppa (2 Chron. ii. 16). Verse 11. Wheat for food, and pure oil—Phœnicia was poor in agricultural produce, but rich in umbrageous growth. The land of Israel was poor in trees, rich in corn and oil. This exchange was, therefore, mutually advantageous. The "pure oil," שֶׁמֶן כָּתִית *beaten, i. e.*, finest oil, was obtained from olives not fully ripe, and pounded in mortars; had a white colour, as well as a better flavour; and yielded a purer and clearer light than the ordinary olive oil obtained through the press.—*Keil* Verse 12. The Lord gave Solomon wisdom, &c., means that, guided by "wisdom profitable to direct," Solomon entered into a friendly alliance and commercial treaty with Hiram. Verse 13. Raised a levy—*lit.*, caused to go up (see note on iv. 6), וַיַּעַל *to take out* "30,000 *men*." These were Israelites, in distinction from Canaanitish bondservants (ch. ix. 20; 2 Chron. viii. 7-9), and prisoners taken by David in war, numbering 153,600; and these levied Israelites are employed on lighter terms than the bondslaves, serving in detachments of 10,000 for one month, and then resting for two months at home, while the other two detachments take their turn. Verse 14. Adoniram was over the levy (*cf.* note on iv. 6). Verse 15. Threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, &c.—70,000 carriers and 80,000 cutters of wood; or, more probably, of stone—חֹצֵב being more strictly used of a cutter of stone (2 Kings xii. 12), although used of both in this instance (Gesenius). This total of 150,000 were "strangers in the land of Israel" (2 Chron. ii. 17), not Israelites. Verse 16. Officers over the work, 3,300—These were over the bondmen; other 550 captains were over the 30,000 Israelites (ch. ix. 23). Verse 18. The stone squarers וְהַגִּבְלִים—The Giblim (Joshua xiii. 5), *i. e.*, inhabitants of גְּבַל—These Giblites (see Ezek. xxvii. 9) were specially skilful in shipbuilding. *Thenius* suggests that the slightly changed word וַיְגַבְּלוּם be accepted, and then reads, "they wreathed the stones, put a border round them," *i. e.*, "And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did *hew them and bevel them.*" Such grooved or bevelled stones, twenty or thirty feet long by six feet, are now visible to Palestine explorers as the basement stones of the ancient temple, and are probably the original stones used "to lay the foundation of the house" (verse 17).—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-18.

PREPARATIONS FOR A GREAT WORK.

I. That the preparations for a great work are facilitated where a genuine friendship exists. 1. *The friendship of a worthy father is often continued to his posterity.* "For Hiram was ever a lover of David" (verse 1). The friendships formed by a good man are a precious legacy to his children. He may have many and bitter enemies; but the faithful few will love him to the end of his days, and after his death will honour his memory even in his offspring. A son will sometimes receive signal advantages in life, for his father's sake. David rejoiced to show kindness to Mephibosheth, the crippled son of his friend Jonathan (2 Sam. ix. 3, 13). "A fast friend is a rare bird. Most friends now-a-days are like Joab's dagger, as soon in and as soon out. The love of foster-brothers in Ireland far surpasseth—saith one, but I believe him not—all the loves of all men. They only love truly that love one another out

of a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. i. 22). This love lasteth."—*Trapp*. 2. *A genuine friendship is strengthened and perpetuated by mutual acts of courtesy and service* (verse 3-11). Solomon responds with great cordiality to the congratulatory embassage of Hiram, and, at the same time, suggests the way in which the Tyrian king can help in his great work of building a house for the Lord. Hiram cheerfully falls in with the arrangement, and the terms of contract are speedily and satisfactorily settled. A friendship where the giving is all on one side, and the receiving all on the other, will soon come to an irreparable breach. The *quid pro quo* may not always be the same in kind; but a true courtesy will ever be ready to acknowledge the preponderance of obligation.

II. That in the preparation for a great work the choicest materials should be obtained (verses 6, 10, 17, compared with 2 Chron. ii. 7, 8). Cedar, gold, and costly stones—the choicest timber, the choicest metal, and the choicest stone—were to be used in the building of the temple. Many wonderful properties are ascribed to the cedar, such as resisting putrefaction, destroying noxious insects, remaining sound for a thousand years, yielding an oil famous for preserving books and writings, &c. The wood is extremely hard, which caused the ancients to believe it incapable of decay. In whatever work we do for God, the best material should be used. Nothing is too good for Him. Some men will spend enormous sums on jewelry, on house furnishing, or on architectural decoration, and yet be content to see the ugliest and shabbiest material used in the service of God. David spared neither time, nor pains, nor expense in gathering together the costliest materials for the projected building, though he well knew he would not be permitted to take part in its erection. Let us not grudge to do the preparatory work by which posterity will principally benefit. He who does something to enrich the future of humanity has not lived in vain.

III. That in the preparation for a great work the best talent should be sought. "There is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians" (verse 6 compared with verse 18). Sidon was a part of the territories of Hiram, and its inhabitants appear to have been the most expert workmen. Much skill is needed in the felling and treatment of timber. According to *Vitruvius*, a contemporary of Julius Cæsar, and author of a celebrated treatise on architecture, timber must be cut in the autumn or in the winter, when it is free from a moisture which is apt to make it rot, and it should be cut in such a manner as to allow the sap to distil away. It should never be exposed to a hot sun, high winds, or rain, nor drawn through the dew; and it should be in like manner guarded for three years before being used in building. Probably these and other similar precautions gave the Sidonians their fame for skill in felling timber. They were also celebrated as builders, and as dextrous in the working of all kinds of metals. *Strabo* ascribes to them great knowledge in philosophy, astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, navigation, and in all the fine arts. Sidon had glass works, linen, and other manufactures, that furnished very ingenious and far-sought commodities. *Homer* represents the most precious and valuable of the great metal wine bowls, in which the Greeks of the heroic age delighted, as imported from Sidon (Odyss. iv. 614-618; xv. 425), and made by Sidonian workmen (Iliad. xxiii. 743, 744). He also ascribes to Sidonian women the production of the beautifully embroidered robes which were worn by Asiatic ladies of the first rank (*ib.* vi. 289-295). Both Herodotus and Homer attest the general nautical skill of the Phœnicians; and the former assigns the palm to Sidon. Talent is the gift of Heaven, and its best efforts and most masterly productions should be consecrated to the noblest ends. The work of God affords scope for the exercise of the most accomplished and fertile genius.

IV. That in the preparations for a great work respect should be had to the condition and wants of the workers. (Compare verses 6, 9, 11, 13-16.) The labourers were well officered, and the toil and drudgery mitigated by a methodised system of relays (verse 14). Without some such system so vast a number of workers would relapse into a confused, tyrannical mob, and inflict on each other much oppression and suffering. Organisation lightens labour, while it consolidates it. The wants of the workers were supplied. In addition to the provisions sent to the royal court of Tyre (verses 9, 11), Solomon furnished to the servants of Hiram 20,000 *cors* (about 222,000 bushels) of beaten wheat, 20,000 *cors* of barley, 20,000 baths of wine, and 20,000 baths of oil (2 Chron. ii. 10). The land of Israel was rich in grain and oil, while in this respect Phœnicia was poor, the steep mountain ranges of Lebanon affording very little space for arable land. Honest labour should be honestly recompensed. In all work for God the utmost diligence and fidelity are demanded; but He will take care the humblest labourer shall not go unrewarded. "No house, even though it be the church and temple of God, should be built to the hurt and oppression of one's fellow-creatures." Every country has its staple commodity, by exchange of which intercourse is maintained with its neighbours. It is the happiness of a nation when, with the corn of Canaan, it possesses also the shipping of Tyre.

V. That in the preparations for a great work help may be obtained from all available sources (verses 6, 8-10, 12, 18). The world may be used as the servant of the church. The unbeliever is often called upon to contribute to a work the spiritual significance and end of which he does not apprehend. The Tyrians, though Gentiles, were employed about the work of the Temple, and thus prefigured the vocation of the Gentiles and their future helping to build up the spiritual temple. *Pellican*, in allegorising this fact, observes that the Sidonians and the proselytes among the Jews were the workmen, but the rulers of the work were Israelites; thus showing forth that the spiritual temple should be built by disciples among the Gentiles, but the Apostles, who were Israelites, should be the chief workmen and governors therein. Solomon "knew that the Tyrians' skill was not given them for nothing. Not Jews only, but Gentiles, must have their hand in building the temple of God: only Jews meddled with the Tabernacle, but the temple is not built without the aid of Gentiles; they, together with us, make up the church of God (Eph. ii. 13, 14). Even pagans have their arts from heaven: how justly may we improve their graces to the service of the God of heaven! If there be a Tyrian who can work more curiously in gold, in silver, in brass, in iron, in purple and blue silk, than an Israelite, why should he not be employed about the temple? Their heathenism is their own, their skill is their Maker's. Many a one works for the church of God that yet hath no part in it.—*Bp. Hall.* The varied talent and material riches of all nations should be made serviceable to the interests of Christ's kingdom, not for ostentation, for that would be "to make a calf of the treasure gotten out of Egypt."

LESSONS:—1. *A great work necessitates corresponding forethought.* 2. *A great work is made up of numberless little efforts.* 3. *Labour is dignified by the greatness of the end it seeks to accomplish.* 4. *The work of one generation is completed by another.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. "For Hiram was ever a lover of David." The influence of a good man. 1. Operates irrespective of distance. 2. Attaches to himself men of widely different creeds. 3. Makes known the character and worship of the true God. 4. Secures valuable friendships for his posterity.

Verse 1-5. Solomon's purpose to build a house to the Lord. 1. *The*

motives. Verses 3-5. Not ambition, the love of glory, the love of pomp; but the divine will and the charge of his father. In every weighty undertaking one must examine and be assured that it do not proceed from selfish motives, but is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (Rom. xii. 2). 2. *The time*—rest and peace (verse 4). A time of peace is the time for building in general, but especially for building houses of God, which are a memorial of thanksgiving for the blessings of peace and prosperity. 3. *The request for assistance* (verse 6). In important undertakings which are agreeable to the will of God and propose his honour, we may and should not hesitate to trust in Him who directs men's hearts, to ask others for aid and assistance.—*Lange.*

Verse 4. National peace. 1. A blessing from God to be gratefully acknowledged. 2. The most favourable period for carrying out great undertakings. 3. Gives greater weight and influence in negotiating with other nations. 4. Is conducive to the free and healthy development of the best qualities of the people. 5. Is an emblematic representation of the universal peace to be.

— "So that there is neither adversary." The Vulgate hath it, *Non est Satan.* We use to say, seldom lieth the Devil dead in a ditch. He is the troublous one, and delighteth to hinder anything that is good; but at this time God had chained him up, and Solomon had nothing to hinder him. "The Lord is with you whilst ye are with Him," saith one prophet (2 Chron. xv. 2). "And the Lord will be with the good," saith another (2 Chron. xix. 11).—*Trapp.* Satan doth all he can to hinder temple-work (1 Thess. ii. 18; Zech. iii. 1); but when he is bound (Rev. xx. 2) we should be busy.

Verse 5. A dutiful son. 1. Cherishes the memory; 2. Maintains the reputation; and 3. Executes the wishes of his deceased parent.

— "I purpose to build a house unto the name of the Lord my God." There is no building of the ancient world which has excited so much attention since the time of its destruction, as the temple which Solomon built at Jerusalem, and its successor as rebuilt by Herod. Its spoils were considered worthy of forming the principal illustration of one of the most beautiful of Roman triumphal arches; and Justinian's highest architectural ambition was, that he might surpass it. Throughout the middle ages it influenced to a considerable degree the forms of Christian churches, and its peculiarities were the watchwords and rallying points of all associations of builders. Since the revival of learning in the sixteenth century, its arrangements have employed the pens of many learned antiquarians, and architects of several countries have taxed their science in trying to reproduce its forms. But it is not only to Christians that the temple of Solomon is so interesting; the whole Mohammedan world look to it as the foundation of all architectural knowledge, and the Jews still recall its glories, and sigh over their loss with a constant tenacity unmatched by that of any other people to any other building of the ancient world.—*Smith's Dictionary.*

— If it cannot come into the mind of every one to build a house of wood and stone unto the Lord, nevertheless, every one to whom God has given wife and children is in a condition to vow and to build a house unto the Lord out of living stones. I and my house will serve the Lord (Josh. xxiv. 15). Israel knew not how to plan great buildings, especially works of art, but they did know how to serve the living God. Better to live without art than without God in the world.—*Lange.*

Verse 6. The cedars of Lebanon are the most celebrated of all the trees of Scripture, the monarchs of the vegetable kingdom. The prophets refer to them as emblems of greatness, majesty, and splendour. Ezekiel (chap. xxxi.) presents us with a most graphic description of their grandeur and beauty when he makes them

representatives of the Assyrian power and glory. The wood was used for beams, pillars, boards, masts of ships, and carved images. Not only did David and Solomon import it for their building purposes, but the king of Assyria and Persia, and, perhaps, of other nations, did the same. The modern cedar of Lebanon is usually from fifty to eighty feet high, and often covers with its branches, when standing alone, a space the diameter of which is greater than the height of the tree. It is an evergreen, and its leaves are produced in tufts. Its branches, disposed in layers, spread out horizontally, and form, as they approach the top, a thick pyramidal head. The profane writers represent the cedar wood as specially noted for its durability, and the cedar roof of the great temple of Diana at Ephesus is said to have lasted four hundred years.

Ver. 7-12 (See also 2 Chron. ii. 11-16). Hiram and Solomon. 1. *Gratification.* Hiram "rejoiced greatly" when he heard the words of King Solomon. This arose partly from the love he bore to his father David; we are always attracted to them who are loved by those whom we love. "For David's sake"—the principle of substitution is everywhere to be seen in human life. An illustration in support of the doctrine of justification by faith. The gratification of Hiram sprang also from a recognition of Solomon's wisdom: gratification in another's good. 2. *Consideration* (verse 8). The demand of Solomon was no small one, and deserved consideration. It involved, in all probability, a great sacrifice on the part of the Tyrians. It is true that in the eleventh verse we are told that "Solomon gave," &c., yet that was for his household, or servants who were engaged in work for Solomon's own benefit. How would this great sacrifice affect Hiram's subjects? Would they be willing to give to the people of another nation so much of their property, and especially for the erection of a temple for the worship of (to them) a strange deity? All these things Hiram must have taken into consideration. Most of the mischief of life is the result of a want of thought and consideration. "Evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as want of heart." 2. *Satisfaction.* "All his desire" (verse 10). There was not one thing which Solomon asked, which Hiram did not grant. It is not right to ask or expect unreasonable things. It is right to grant reasonable requests, even if they should occasion sacrifice; unreasonable requests should not be granted, even if it should be more easy to do so than to refuse. 4. *Recognition.* "Endued with understanding" (2 Chron. ii. 13). Knowledge, genius, skill, are of heavenly birth, and to despise them is to be guilty of a sin. 5. *Combination.* Solomon and Hiram were not independent of each other. No one can serve God properly in isolation: "Two are better far than one," &c. Query, Have Christians a right to remain detached from the church of Christ? 6. *Distribution.* (See 2 Chron. ii. 16.) Each did the part allotted to him; the result was success.—*F. Wagstaff.*

Ver. 7. It proves a noble heart when a man, free from envy and jealousy, sincerely praises and thanks God for the gifts and blessings which He grants to others. When God wishes well to a nation He bestows upon it godly rulers; but when He wills to chastise it He removes them. Hiram praises God that He bestows upon another people a wise monarch: how much more should that people itself thank God, since He bestowed upon it a wise and pious king?

Verse 7-10. The heathen king Hiram. 1. His rejoicing over Solomon and his undertaking. 2. His praise of the God of Israel. 3. His willingness to help. How far stands this heathen above so many who call themselves Christians!—*Lange.*

Verse 12. Kingly wisdom. 1. Is a divine gift. 2. Is honourably employed in cultivating peaceful relations with neighbouring kingdoms. 3. Encourages a prosperous commerce. 4. Promotes the best social interests

of the people. 5. Conserves and extends the religious life of the church.

—**The league between Solomon and Hiram.** 1. *Its object*—a good God-pleasing work begun in the service of God. Like kings and nations, even so individual men should unite only for such purposes. 2. *Its conditions*—each gave to the other according to his desire; neither sought to overreach the other; the compact was based upon honesty and fairness, not upon cunning and selfishness. Only upon such compacts does the blessing of God rest, for unjust possessions do not prosper.—*Lange.*

Verse 13-18. The workmen at the temple building. 1. *Israelites.* Solomon acted not like Pharaoh (Exod. ii. 23). He laid no insupportable burdens upon his people, but permits variety in the work, and Israel itself undertakes it without murmurs or complaints. How high do those Israelites stand above so many Christian communities, who constantly object or murmur when they are about to undertake any labour for their temple, or must needs bring a sacrifice of mercy or time! 2. *Heathen* (Psa. xxii. 29). Jew and heathen together must build the temple of God, according to divine decree—a prophetic anticipation of fact as set forth Eph. ii. 14, 19-22; iii. 4-6. The great preparations of Solomon must naturally remind us of the far greater preparations and arrangements which God has made for the building of the spiritual temple of the New Testament. How many thousand faithful labourers, how many wise and good men, has he placed in every known part of the world: how has he furnished them with wisdom and many other gifts of the Spirit, so that the great work of the glorious building may be completed!—*Lange.*

Verse 17. "And they brought costly stones to lay the foundation." Now is the foundation laid, and the walls rising of that glorious fabric which all nations admired, and all times have celebrated. Even those stones which were laid in the base of the building were not ragged and rude, but hewn and costly: the part that lies covered with earth from the eyes of all beholders is no less precious than those that are more conspicuous. God is not all for the eye: He pleaseth Himself with the hidden value of the living stones of His spiritual temple. How many noble graces of His servants have been buried by obscurity! not discerned so much as by their own eyes! which yet as He gave, so He crowneth. Hypocrites regard nothing but show; God nothing but truth.—*Bp. Hall.*

CHAPTER VI.

THE BUILDING OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Began to build the house of the Lord—The chronological year is carefully noted, and no criticism supplies reason for changing the figures here given. The Sept. reads 440 instead of 480, but is supported by no ancient MS. The *site* was Mount Moriah (2 Chron. iii. 1). "The uneven rock of Moriah had to be levelled, and the inequalities filled by immense substructions of great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones" (ch. v. 17).—*Stanley.* Verse 2. Cubits—The ancient standard length of a cubit was one foot six inches English measure. The structure is separated into *three main architectural divisions*: "the house" (verse 2), "the porch" (verse 3), and "the chambers round about" (verse 5). The house הַבַּיִת was constructed of massive stone walls (verses 6, 7), and included two compartments; the front is called (verse 5) "the temple of the house" הֵיכַל הַבַּיִת and the "oracle" (verse 5) in the rear, דְּבִיר Verse 4. Windows—Of their number, situation, and shape or size no information is given, none therefore possessed

With narrow lights—Probably lattices. Verse 5. **Chambers round about**—On three sides of the "house" there were chambers in three stories. Verse 11. **And the word of the Lord came to Solomon**—*i. e.*, during the erection of the sacred structure, in order to encourage the king in his work, and remind him of the solemn conditions under which he reared a temple for Jehovah. The word "*if* thou wilt" (verse 12) would warn the king and people against assuming that God would be satisfied with a magnificent building. He required spiritual consecration: without that in them He would never "dwell among" them (verse 13) in His manifested glory over the mercy seat. Verse 15. **The cedar** was used for the inner walls and ceiling, the cypress ("fir") for the floor. Verse 16. The whole internal space of the "house" was divided by a cedar wall from the floor to the ceiling, this partition consisting of folding doors, drawn to and fro by golden chains (verse 21); these two apartments were respectively the **front**, measuring forty cubits square, "the holy place," לִפְנֵי, and the rear, measuring twenty **cubits square**, "the most holy place," דְּבִיר. Verse 18. **Knops and open flowers**—Bitter gourds and opened buds. Verse 21. **He made a partition by the chains of gold**—*i.e.*, he made the partition to go upon golden chains; or worked the partition by golden chains. Verse 22. The whole house he overlaid with gold—*i.e.*, the entire interior of the holy place, and the altar, and the holy of holies. Verse 23. **Two cherubim of olive tree**—These כְּרוּבִים were of a form which can only be conjectured by us. In Ezek. xli. and Rev. iv. further descriptive indications are given; but the cherub is represented variously, with one, two, and then four various faces; and with two, four, or six wings; probably colossal figurative images of *manifold* and *majestic life*. "Standing on the highest step of created life, and uniting in themselves the most perfect created life, they are the most perfect revelation of God and the Divine life."—*Bahr*. *Olive wood* was employed in their construction, as being most solid and durable. Their outspread wings spanned the entire breadth of the temple from side to side, meeting and touching in the centre of the holy "oracle" (verse 27). Verse 29. **Carved all the walls . . . within and without**—*lit.*, *from within to without*, מִלִּפְנִים וּלַחִיצוֹן, *i.e.*, from the inner oracle, the holy of holies, to the outer compartment, the holy place. Verse 34. **The two leaves of the one door were folding**—It seems from this that the door consisted of two wings, or halves, and these were made like leaves of the wild olive tree, either longitudinally like leaves bound together, or the two leaves were the upper and lower halves of each door wing. Verse 37. **In the fourth year, &c.**—The time occupied in erecting the temple was from the second month of the fourth year to the eighth month of the eleventh year of Solomon's reign; *i.e.*, about seven years and a half; a short period for so magnificent an edifice; but the large number of workmen employed, and the vast preliminary preparation of stones and timber which were used, explain the comparative speed with which this temple of Jehovah's glory was reared and finished.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-38.

The Temple of Solomon an Emblem of the Church of God.

I. The Church of God, like the Temple of Solomon, rests on a solid foundation. In forming the sub-basement of the gorgeous temple on Mount Moriah huge stones were quarried, carefully chiselled and squared, and laid deep in the earth with the utmost precision (chapter v. 17). Josephus says: "The king laid the foundation of the temple very deep in the ground, and the materials were strong stones, and such as would resist the force of time. These were to unite themselves with the earth, and become a basis and sure foundation to sustain with ease those vast superstructures and precious ornaments whose own weight was to be not less than the weight of those other high and heavy buildings which the king designed to be very ornamental and magnificent." So the church of God is securely settled on a foundation of truths that know no decay, and which shall survive the wreck and ruin of the most solid structures of earth. In vain tempests rage, or earthquakes rumble, or enemies assail—this foundation is immovable: the truth of God is unalterably the same.

II. The Church of God, like the Temple of Solomon, is composed of a great variety of materials. The stone, the wood, the gold, the brass, the iron, ar

the textile fabrics used in the construction and beautifying of the material temple point out the great diversity of moral character which now constitutes the temple of God (Luke xiii. 29). The stars that glitter in the firmament vary in magnitude, in motion, and in embellishments; but their light is one, and they together form the same grand temple of the skies. Diversity in unity is the leading characteristic in all the works of God.

III. The Church of God, like the Temple of Solomon, is gradual and silent in its erection (verse 7.) When Bishop Heber read to a friend his poem on Palestine, he was reminded that in describing the Temple of Solomon he had made no reference to the silence in which the building proceeded. The poet turned aside, and in a few minutes struck off the beautifully expressive line:—

"Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprang."

"In order to reconcile the spirit of the new architecture as nearly as possible with the letter of the old law (Deut. xxvii. 5, 6), the stones were hewn in the quarries and placed with reverent silence one upon another without sound of axe or hammer, and the temple rose as if by the gradual growth of nature." The work was not done in haste. Years had been spent in thoughtful and substantial preparations; and more than seven years were occupied in the actual building (verses 1, 37-38). Some of the greatest movements are for a time veiled in obscurity until the right moment comes, when the obscurity vanishes, and the vastness and splendour of the work elicit the wonder and admiration of the age. We are familiar with this process in the natural world and in the progress of individual history. The fruits of the earth do not reach maturity at a bound. Slowly and in secret the bud is rounded, then comes the delicately-tinted blossom, and afterwards the glossy, mellow fruit. The same may be said of the growth of human character. It reaches the higher grade of mental and moral excellence by slow and silent stages, and advances in the same ratio with the fidelity and energy with which the man carries out the great plan of his life-career. The plan and scope of our individual life is often obscure to us; but as we endeavour to work out that part that is clear, the whole gradually becomes more distinctly defined. And so in rearing the temple of God, the work proceeds deliberately and noiselessly. Such a method is an education and discipline to the church. The grandest truths of God are not comprehended suddenly by the weakness of man: inquiry is provoked and faith in the divine wisdom and power encouraged.

IV. The Church of God, like the Temple of Solomon, is the scene of hallowed worship. 1. *There the truth of God is deposited.* "The oracle he prepared in the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the Lord" (verse 19). The ark contained the two tables of stone, inscribed with the ten commandments which testified to the nature of the covenant existing between Jehovah and his people. Over the ark stretched the wings of the cherubim (verses 23-27). This was the very throne of Jehovah, who was said to "dwell between the cherubim." It was also called the Mercy Seat or Propitiatory, because Jehovah there revealed himself, especially on the great day of atonement, as "God pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin." Nor was it without the profoundest allusion to the coming dispensation of the gospel that God's throne of *Mercy* covered and hid the tables of the *law*. The attitude of the cherubim was significant of the desire of angelic intelligences to learn the gospel mysteries that were hidden in the law. The more complete revelation of the divine will is committed to the custody of the Christian church, and it is her function to disseminate the knowledge of that will. Acquaintance with divine truth is essential to intelligent and acceptable worship. 2. *There praise is offered.* The devout Israelite rejoiced to praise God in His sanctuary. Praise is the essence of all true worship.

Should be offered continually (Psalm xxxiv. 1). Should be intelligent and fervid (1 Cor. xiv. 15). Is often the precursor of special blessing (compare 2 Chron. v. 13, 14; Neh. viii. 6, 9, 12, 17, 25, 26; Acts xvi. 25, 26). Should always follow the reception of blessing (Acts ii. 46, 47). The prophetic description of the heavenly temple designates its walls "salvation," and its gates "praise." 3. *There the divine glory is manifested.* The Temple of Solomon was the scene of revelations of overpowering splendour (2 Chron. v. 14). The glory of Jehovah shone forth from between the cherubim (Ps. lxxx. 1). The sanctuary has ever been the place where the soul has beheld its brightest visions (Ps. lxiii. 2). The church is the repository of heavenly mysteries and the academy where they are explained. Here many a dark mind has been illumined, many a burdened soul relieved, many a strange providence interpreted, many a tangled question settled. The manifestation of Jehovah to the soul fills it with solid satisfaction and radiant joy.

V. The Church of God, like the Temple of Solomon, is the dwelling place of Jehovah (verse 11-13). The presence of Jehovah is the charm, the life, and the glory of the church. "Methinks," says Bishop Hall, "I see four temples in this one. It is but one in matter, as the God that dwells in it is but one; three, yet more in resemblance, according to the division of them in whom it pleases God to inhabit; for wherever God dwells, there is His temple. O God! Thou vouchsafest to dwell in the believing heart. The heaven of heavens is not able to contain thee, and yet thou disdainest not to dwell in the strait lodgings of our renewed souls. So, then, because God's children are many, and those many divided in respect of themselves, though united in their head, therefore this temple, which is but one in collection, as God is one, is manifold in the distribution, as the saints are many; each man bearing about with him a little shrine of this Infinite Majesty. This temple of stone, though most rich and costly, yet what is it to the living temple of the Holy Ghost, which is our body? What is the temple of this body of ours to the temple of Christ's body, which is His church? And what is the temple of God's church on earth to that which triumpheth gloriously in heaven?"

VI. The Church of God, like the Temple of Solomon, is permanent in its reputation. Notwithstanding the chequered history of the Temple—the glory of its prime, the humiliation of its decay; its disasters, its transformations, its demolition—it retains to this day a conspicuous place in the veneration of the wandering and scattered Israelites, and in the esteem and marvel of the religious world. Its memory will never perish: the material type has vanished; the spiritual antitype endures. So the church of God, alternating with the ebb and flow of reverses and triumphs, is ever advancing more distinctly into view, is gaining on the admiration and affection of the race, and is winning for herself immortal renown.

The Building of the Heavenly Temple (Verse 7).

The house built in this mysterious silence was the first temple at Jerusalem. Of all earthly objects this, to the ancient Jew, was the most sacred and dear. If he loved his God, it was the scene of his sweetest joys. If he loved Him not, he loved His temple. The men who wrote the Scriptures partook of this feeling. Would they raise the believer in Jesus to his highest honour? "Know ye not," says one, "that ye are the temple of God?" Would they describe the church in her brightest glory? The beauty of Zion is made an emblem of her; the church is represented as "an holy temple," designed and builded for its Creator's praise. The subject before us is a view of the redeemed church as a temple now building by God in an eternal world.

I. The materials of which it is composed. And what are they? They came to it from a very far country. Heaven itself could not supply them. In themselves, they are worthless; but the means which have been employed to remove them thither have made them costly, precious. They are an innumerable multitude of sinners, brought from the fallen world on which we are standing—materials strange indeed to be employed in such a place, but better calculated than any other to manifest the wisdom and the power of God. They are well described as "stones made ready." A stone, in its original state, is rough and unshapen, incapable of separating itself from its native rock and, even if separated, unfit for the workman's use. It may serve for the wall of a mean and humble structure; but the builders of a temple will not touch it. Now, this is precisely our natural state. It was once the state of all the redeemed. But a blessed change at length transformed them. These stones were "made ready" for a glorious building; these senseless, mean, sinful beings were prepared for heaven; and the work was God's. He selected them, chose them out from among their fellow-sinners, and then formed them a people for himself. The exterior of the earthly temple at Jerusalem was of polished marble; it glittered, we are told, with a snowy whiteness; and nothing was seen within but cedar and gold; but as for this heavenly house, he calls its walls "salvation," and its gates "praise." Here stands revealed that truth which every view that we can take of heaven confirms, "Ye must be born again." The stones were made ready, not in this house, but "before they were brought thither." No axes or hammer were found there to prepare them. Nor are any means of grace to be found beyond the skies. There no preacher warns, no afflictions soften, no patient Saviour entreats, no spirit strives.

II. The foundation of this heavenly building. And how wonderfully adapted is this to the materials of which it is composed! The sinners who are now rejoicing in glory had another world once given them. It was a good, a fair, and happy world: but they lost it; at least they lost its happiness, and covered it with misery and death. They have now another kingdom bestowed upon them; but will they not lose this also? The fallen angels once possessed it; but though they "excel in strength," they kept it not. How, then, shall worms of the dust be safe in so high a station? The same omnipotent Being who redeemed their souls from destruction, and formed them for heaven, has covenanted, pledged Himself, to keep them secure for ever. Hence, if we speak of them as a building, the Holy Spirit testifies of Him as the foundation on which it stands. He is its chief "corner stone," its "sure foundation;" the support, the security, the immovable resting place, of the whole fabric. He sustains this relation now to the church on earth, and He is as ready in His love, as able in "the greatness of His strength," to bear the weight of the far happier and wider church above. The convulsions that shake the worlds from their places will not throw down a pillar, nor even loosen a stone, of this mighty structure; the events of eternity will not move it. There is underneath it a living, an everlasting Rock, on which it is not only built, but to which it is united. It is in it, become a part of it; so that it can no more be torn from it than that Rock itself can be shivered and destroyed. "In Jesus Christ," says St. Paul, "all the building groweth." "In Him ye also are builded together."

III. The manner in which this temple is built. 1. Like almost every work of its great author, it is accomplished *gradually*. The first stone of it was laid when righteous Abel found himself in glory; and since that period, another and another has been added, according to the good pleasure "of Him who worketh all things after the council of His own will." Sometimes it has risen slowly; at other times it has advanced with wonderful rapidity; but at all

times "the God of all grace" has been employed on it, so that the building has increased in height and glory through all generations. In the present day the Lord is hastening His work. He is "adding to His church daily such as shall be saved;" and after He has made them ready, He takes them from this His earthly habitation, and fixes them, one after another, in their places, in His fairer temple above.

2. This temple is building also *constantly, steadily, surely*—without interruption or hindrance. Earthly structures do not proceed thus. Unforeseen difficulties embarrass, and unavoidable delays retard. Sometimes the design of the builder is changed; at other times he is baffled in carrying it into effect. It is not so, however, when God builds. His purposes never change; they can never be frustrated. "Before the mountains were brought forth," He formed the stupendous plan of His heavenly house. It was the work, the masterpiece, of His infinite skill; and it contains "treasures of wisdom and knowledge," which angels cannot explore, nor eternity unfold. The directions given for the Jewish temple were minute; but in this most glorious edifice nothing was overlooked. It was "ordered in all things, and sure." We know but little of the magnificence of this plan, but were it possible that it could be yet more vast, we know that there is ability in Christ to perform it all. His people, though more numerous than the stars of heaven, shall all "be willing in the day of His power;" and as for His enemies, they can no more impede His designs, than a host of worms could delay the rolling of the glorious sun.

3. Thus goes the building on, gradually, constantly; but yet, all this time, *silently*. Turn again to the Jewish temple. "There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was building" (verse 7). This silence has something in it deeply mysterious. It could not have happened from mere chance. It was undoubtedly enjoined by God, and intended to convey some important truth. The question is, What is that truth? And this is not easily answered. (1.) It intimates, *the unnoticed and secret manner in which God carries on His purposes of grace in a tumultuous world.* What is the history of the world? A history of commotions. Its great men have seldom moved, but confused noise and garments rolled in blood have marked their footsteps. They have struggled till whole kingdoms have resounded with their deeds, and this poor distracted earth has resembled "the troubled sea when it cannot rest." But God, in the midst of them, unperceived and almost unthought of, is bringing His own purposes to pass; is making "the wrath of man to praise Him," and the wickedness of man to do His will. He presides in the storm. The waves thereof toss themselves, but He turns every billow that swells to the furtherance of His own glory. (2.) The silence in this temple may remind us of *the secret operations of God in the souls of men.* Sometimes He turns their thought to Himself by the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, by means which are visible and striking; but it is generally in "the still small voice" that He manifests Himself as the God of their salvation. The seed is sown in their hearts, they know not when; "it groweth up they know not how;" it brings forth fruit of which they themselves are often unconscious. They are ripened for heaven in a way which they understand not, and then they die, and go there by a road which none can discover. They lie down in the grave, and all is silence. And what a peaceful world do they enter! (3.) The stillness among the Jewish builders might be designed to remind us of *the peace of heaven.* All there is unbroken calmness. Changes and afflictions have ceased. The souls they so often assailed and wrought on, need them no more. No longer earthly, they are now heavenly and faultless. All is purity, and perfection, and brightness. The work is done; the instruments thereof are cast aside; and not a sound is heard but the voice of overflowing blessedness, and the songs of adoration, and the shout of praise. Now what may we learn from this part of our subject? We are taught *not to despair of the cause of God*

even in the darkest scenes. Look where we will, the state of the world is indeed deplorable. But amid all its clamour and strifes, the work of God is going gradually, surely, silently on. We hear the voice that is lifted up in the streets, the conqueror's shout, the wrangler's curse, and the worldling's song, but we hear not the prayer of the broken heart, we see not the bended knee, we mark not the spirit that in this cottager's hut, or in that poor man's dwelling, bursts joyfully from its prison of clay, and is carried home by the angels of God. We may learn here, too, *the character of true religion.* Nothing is more common in some parts of our land than an ostentatious, noisy display of affected piety. Beware of a love of display. Beware of a bold, forward, unmeaning tongue. It will please, it will deceive, none but the simple; it will disgust all the wise. Let your tempers, let your lives, speak with a louder voice than your words. True religion is a silent, humble, retiring thing. It is as modest as it is bold. It will come into public notice, rather than leave misery unrelieved, ignorance unaided, or any duty undone; it will brave the opposition and cruelty of a whole world, rather than sin; and then it will retire into its closet, and be seen only by its God.

IV. The great end for which this heavenly temple is raised. And this, perhaps, is too often overlooked. The temple of Solomon was not built for this single purpose, that it might be "a house of prayer for all nations." It was designed to be the habitation of God, the seat of His presence, and a monument of His name. And this heavenly temple is erected for the same purpose; not so much for the sake of the living and shining stones that compose it, as for the honour of its great builder; not so much for the salvation of the poor outcasts of the earth, as for the glory of the power, wisdom, and grace of the great God of heaven. Brethren, will this blessedness be ours? The edifice of which you have been hearing is not a creation of fancy, the baseless fabric of a dream. It is as true that there are pardoned sinners joyful in heaven, as that there are dying, suffering sinners within these walls. It becomes a question, then, and a very solemn one, Shall we ever see this glorious temple? Shall we ever form a part of it? To answer this question we must ask another: Are our souls emblems of this great building? Are we now "the temples of the Holy Ghost?"—"habitations of God through the Spirit?" With such a weight of glory before us, shall we repine at the strokes which are making us ready for its honours and happiness? What if the blows fall heavy and fast? The sound of the axes and hammers will the sooner cease; if not, the more honourable will be our place in the building, the more shall we show forth in heaven the glory of the Lord.—C. Bradley.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 23-28.

The Cherubim Emblematic of the Highest Forms of Life.

The doctrine of the Cherubim has elicited a great variety of views among the ablest expositors. By some the symbol has been made to signify either the four covenants; or all the creatures; or the four cardinal virtues—justice, wisdom, fortitude, and temperance; or the four faculties in the soul—rational, irascible, concupiscible, and conscience; or the four chief passions—joy, grief, hope, and fear; or the four great monarchies; or the four elements; or the four evangelists. Others have contended that the cherubic figures were intended to symbolize the Divine Persons in the Sacred Trinity—the figure of the lion being associated with the human form to indicate the promised incarnation; or that they were glowing emblems of the character and modes of

operation of the Third Person of the Trinity; or that the cherubim were no other than holy angels, and the figures of them in the Temple were symbolical representations of their nature and ministry. Dr. Kitto argues in favour of the opinion that the cherubim represent the whole multitude of the redeemed from among men, not of any section of the church, nor of any class of its members, but of the great body of believers in the Atonement throughout all ages, countries, and nations. "In the immediate application of this symbol," he writes, "it may be said that, when the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle, which he never did without the blood of atonement in his hands, and looked upon the Ark of the Covenant with its cherubic appendages, with the Shekinah enthroned between, he beheld, in fact, but a miniature model of what he saw on a large scale without, when standing amidst the many thousands of Israel abiding in their tents. *Here* were the cherubic symbols resolved into their constituent multitudes; and over the host rested in calm majesty the pillar of cloud, the visible *external* token of the Divine presence permanently residing among the tribes. And even this was, as our further light indicates, but a type of that which the Israelites could not see, and would not like to have seen, of multitudes redeemed to God, out of all nations, by the blood of atonement, forming the Church of God among whom He should dwell." For homiletical purposes, the more practical views entertained on this subject may be combined by regarding *the Cherubim as emblematic of the Highest Forms of Life.*

I. The cherubim were emblematic of life in general. A conspicuous and extraordinary feature of the cherubim was their *wings* (v. 24, 27, compared with Isa. vi. 2; Ezek. i. 23-25). Wings are suggestive of motion, and motion of life. As the eye of the devout worshipper rested on the figures of the cherubim carved on the cedar walls of the temple and on the folding doors of the oracle (v. 29-35), he would be reminded that life in its lowest forms had its origin from that Being before whose awful presence he bowed. The world teems with evidences of life. The swarming insects, the merry, fluttering birds, the gleaming, trembling waters with their countless inhabitants, display to the observer that earth, air, and sea, are pregnant with vitality. Life at all times and in any aspect is full of mystery; it eludes the keenest search and puzzles the ablest analyst. The ancients recognized the Divine origin of life in their story of Prometheus, who climbed the heavens by the assistance of Minerva, and stole fire from the chariot of the sun, which he brought down in a hollow stick or ferule to animate his man of clay. The genius of man may construct mechanical marvels, but it cannot inspire life. All life depends for its origin and perpetuity on the will of God. This seems the first and most elementary truth suggested by the cherubic symbol, and its surrounding decorations of palm tree and open flowers (v. 29).

II. The cherubim were emblematic of manifold forms of life. The cherubim were composite images significant of all forms of creature life, and symbols of the living presence of Jehovah in all departments of the animal world. Their form is described in the opening vision of Ezekiel i. 5-11. Each cherub had four faces and four wings, and every part of their appearance seems to have been symbolical of some aspect or manifestation of Divine energy and power in creature life. A Jewish proverb says, concerning the cherubim: "Four are the highest things in the world: the lion amongst the wild beasts, the bull amongst cattle, the eagle amongst birds, the man is over all, but God is supreme." God, on the other hand, is common to these four, and the life uniting them, which they have not of themselves, but from Him who is the source of all life—the Creator, and hence stands and is enthroned above them all. The distribution and limitation of life are among the mysteries and

wonders of creation. The character of each individual plant or animal is decided and shaped by the measure of life-force it contains. This accounts for the endless variety to be found in nature. But life, in whatever form or degree manifested—whether in the crawling worm or the majestic lion, in the slimy frog or the stately bull, in the humble sparrow or the soaring eagle, in the sluggish octopus or in divinely-imaged man—has but one source in God. This idea of the cherubic figures, as representative of multiform life, was evidently embodied in the mythologies of the ancients, though travestied by many an extravagance. We observe it in the Egyptian Sphinx, or Serapis, compounded of the human and the quadruped; in the Persian Mithra, sun and bull; and in the Roman Diana, horse, dog, and man.

III. The cherubim were emblematic of the higher forms of spiritual life. "These cherubim," observes *Bahr*, "as beings standing on the highest step of created life, and uniting in themselves the most perfect created life, are the most perfect relation of God and the Divine life." This life is enjoyed in a very lofty degree by the angels, who are frequently represented in Scripture by cherubic symbols; but the higher possibilities of the spiritual life are reserved for those who accept, by faith, the blessings of the atonement, shadowed forth by the teachings of that mercy-seat on which the cherubim bent their meditative gaze. The first mention of the cherubim in Gen. iii. 24 is suggestive. Man had fallen; transgression had brought its penalty: he was already subject to the fear of death. Still, between him and this issue stood the tree of life; he might still eat and live for ever. God saw his wretchedness, and in mercy interposed; for what would life be but one protracted curse beneath the frown of the angry and unpropitiated Deity? A voice is heard but not as from the Shekinah; communion may be held, but it must be from between the cherubim; a more spiritual economy is already inaugurated; man's attention is to be turned from the paradise of earth to the paradise of heaven; sacrifices already foreshadow the mediatorial atonement, and the first development of the Spirit's operations is seen in restraining man from impending evil, and conducting him to a holier and more spiritual life. The cherubic symbols were but figures borrowed from nature to represent great spiritual qualities, and they were eminently adapted to do so. What better type could be found of intelligence, wisdom, sympathy, and every generous and tender emotion, than the face of man; of strength, courage, and magnanimity of spirit than the body of the lion; of patient endurance, unwearied service, and meek submission to the yoke, than the face of the ox; and of an active, fervent, soaring spirit, than the wings of an eagle?

IV. The cherubim were emblematic of the operations of the Third Person in the Trinity as the source of the highest kind of life. Some writers have contended that the vision of cherubic splendour recorded in Ezekiel i. symbolizes the offices and work of the Holy Spirit; that not more fully are the glowing pages of Isaiah occupied with a delineation of Christ's birth, life, sufferings, death, and the glories which should follow, than is the sublime and majestic scroll of Ezekiel, full from end to end of the illustration of that mighty agency, the Holy Ghost, whether viewed under the emblems of fire, air, or water. The argument is ingeniously set forth in a lecture on the cherubic symbol, delivered before the Young Men's Christian Association in London, by Dr. J. B. Melson, in summarizing which he observes, "We have seen this symbol restraining our first parents in paradise; witnessing to the acceptance of the sacrifice of Abel; assuring Abraham of his inheritance in Mamre; connected with the commissioning of Moses, in which we have a type of that commission which every faithful minister of God must receive; guiding, defending, and comforting the children of Israel in their wanderings; and showing forth the

very method in which the Spirit still guides, defends, and comforts God's Israel in our day. We have entered Solomon's temple, and seen it beautifying the place of the Divine residence with its infoldings and its unfoldings until the priests could no longer minister by reason of the glory. We have seen the same symbol mysteriously connected with the revelation of God's will to Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah, and with the glowing representations of regenerating, quickening, and sanctifying energy with which the pages of the prophet of Chebar abound. Daniel saw the glory in its cherubic chariot ascending into heaven, the shepherds beheld it returning again to earth. This glory conducts the wise men to Bethlehem, and clothes the top of Tabor with its fleecy light; it receives the conqueror as he rises triumphant, enriched with the spoils of death and of hell. The glory carries him up into heaven from the heights of Olivet, and descends in flame upon the heads of the disciples at Jerusalem, filling the room where they were sitting." In this view, the work of the Holy Spirit is brought more vividly and constantly before the mind than a cursory student of Scripture would observe; it localises and embodies the spiritual and unseen; it helps to differentiate the subtlest influences; it strengthens faith, and stimulates the soul to seek after a more intensely spiritual life.

LESSONS.—1. *It is the tendency of all life to assume some visible form.* 2. *Great spiritual truths are strikingly represented by well-known material symbols.* 3. *The spiritual life of the believer is a grander reality than its most imposing emblems.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1 and 38. Why was the time for building the Temple so exactly specified? 1. *Because it was a most important event to Israel.* It points to the final aim of the leading out of Egypt, the land of bondage. The time of the wandering, of unrest, and of battle, is over; Israel is in possession of the whole of the promised land; the time of the kingdom of peace is come. The temple is a memorial of the truth and mercy of God, who ever fulfils his promises, albeit after many long years (Ex. iii. 17), supplies all wants, and governs things excellently. The word of the Lord is sure. After long wandering, after many a cross, many a tribulation and trouble, comes the promised time of peace; the Lord helps His people, even as He preserves every single being unto His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. iv. 18). 2. *Because it is a world-historical event.* The temple of Solomon is the first and only one in the whole ancient world which was erected to the one, true, and living God. Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people (Is. lx. 2). Heathendom had here and there greater temples, but they were the abodes of darkness: this temple is the abode of light and life; from it light breaks forth over all nations (Is. ii. 3; Jer. iii. 7; Mic. iv. 2). What avails the greatest, most glorious temple, if darkness instead of light proceeds from it, and, amid all the prayers and praises, the knowledge of the living God is wanting?

Verse 2. The exceeding glory and pomp of the temple. 1. *The idea to which it bore witness.* No house, no palace in Israel compared, for splendour and glory, with the house of God. Everything in the shape of costly material and treasure which the age permitted, all toil and art were lavished upon it. To the Most High were given the noblest and dearest of men's possessions. How many princes, how many nations, how many cities build gorgeous palaces, and adorn with gold and all treasures the buildings designed to minister to the pride of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and to a haughty manner of life; but yet have no money, no sacrifice, for the temples

which either are entirely wanting, or are poor and miserable in appearance! 2. *The purpose which it served.* Its magnificence has no empty, dead show, to dazzle and intoxicate the senses; everything was full of meaning, and referred to higher, Divine things; it was not meant to render sensual man still more sensual, but to draw him nearer to the supersensuous, and thus to elevate him. Empty parade is unseemly for any house of God; rather must everything which wealth and art can accomplish serve to raise the heart and mind to God, so that each one shall say, This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven (Gen. xxviii. 17).—*Lange.*

— The same rule that skilful carvers observe in cutting out the perfect statue of a man, that the height be thrice the breadth, and the breadth one-third of the height, was likewise duly observed in the fabric of the temple, whose length was double to the height and treble to the breadth, as being sixty cubits long, thirty high, and twenty broad. How exquisite a symmetry hast thou ordained, O God, betwixt the faithful heart and thy church on earth, with that in heaven! How accurate in each of these, in all their powers and parts, compared with others! So hath God ordered the believing soul that it hath neither too much shortness of grace, nor too much height of conceit, nor too much breadth of passion; so hath He ordered His visible church, that there is a necessary inequality without any disproportion, a height of government, a length of extent, a breadth of jurisdiction, duly answerable to each other: so hath He ordered His triumphant church above, that it hath a length of eternity, answered with a height of perfection and a breadth of incomprehensible glory.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 3, 16, 17. As the temple hath three distinctions of rooms—the porch, the holy place, and the holy of holies, so is each of them answered spiritually. In the porch we find the regenerate soul entering into the blessed society of the church; in the holy place the communion of the true visible church on earth selected from the world; in the holy of holies, whereinto the high priest entered once a year, the glorious heaven into which our true High Priest, Christ Jesus, entered once for all to make an atonement betwixt God and man.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 5. All round there was an additional construction of three stories, the foundation of which leant upon the outer wall of the house, which, on this account, grew narrower every storey, so that the rafters of the circuit leant upon it without being let into the wall. Thus was the temple, like the heart, concealed, its walls with their graceful proportions, as they rose towards heaven, becoming lighter and finer; upon them, however, rested the outer building which belonged to them, as the whole being rests upon the heart filled with faith.

Verse 7. The greatest works often proceed in deepest silence. 1. Examples in the motion of the celestial bodies, the force of gravition, the flow of the tides, the growth of vegetation. 2. Noise and demonstrativeness are no evidence of real progress. 3. The most impressive feature in all Divine operations is their silence. 4. The voiceless testimony of the church before the world is often irresistibly effective.

— The temple is framed in Lebanon, and set upon Zion. Neither hammer nor axe was heard in that holy structure. There was nothing but noise in Lebanon; nothing in Zion but silence and peace. Whatever tumults are abroad, it is fit there should be all quietness and sweet concord in the church. O God, that the axes of schism, or the hammers of furious contentions, should be heard within thy sanctuary! Thine house is not built with blows, with blows it is beaten down. O knit the hearts of thy servants together in the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace, that we mind and speak the same things, that thou who art the God of peace mayest

take pleasure to dwell under the quiet roof of our hearts!—*Bp. Hall.*

— The building of the Temple emblematic of the building up of Christian character. The erection of the Temple was a type of the building up of Christian character—an emblem of the manner in which the Spirit of God builds up the minds of men in holiness. If we attempt to dismiss entirely from our thoughts all things that are material, we shall not find it easy, nor, perhaps, possible, to realise the ideas for which they stand. For instance, take the case of sacrifice: turn away your mind entirely from any material, visible sacrifice, and can you tell what a sacrifice is—a sacrifice of God? Then, again, dismiss from your mind the material image of a temple, and could a Jew, can *you*, fully grasp the thought of God dwelling in man—a mind in a mind, intellect in intellect, reason in reason, will in will?

I. The erection of the Temple was God's work. It was built by His express direction, and He connected Himself with it in a manner not common to any place on earth. Men were sometimes inspired to speak and sometimes to act; and under the guidance of this inspiration the Temple was erected, and God Himself condescended to preside over it in a special manner. Thus it was the erection of God Himself, and was intended as a book in which the Jews might read high and Divine principles.

Now leave the Temple, and look at the Christian, and there learn that God is at the foundation of Christian character—that the erection, the progress, the completion of the Christian character, and its consummation in heaven, is an idea and work of God. The Temple answered political and civil ends; but it also shadowed forth some great spiritual truth; and what was that truth? That the great God means to make living souls His dwelling place, intends to live with men, and that there is such a thing as the union of the Spirit of God with the Spirit of man And hence the soul of man is called in the New Testament "a living temple."

II. The Temple, as an emblem of the Christian, was the place of mercy, the place of law, the place of worship. 1. *The Temple was a place of mercy.* There was erected a throne of mercy; there mercy was, as it were, localized. God's design was, to give man a clear conception of mercy. Mercy was in the heavens, mercy was in the seasons, mercy breathed in all things around the Jewish people; but they did not recognise it, they did not realize it. In the Temple there was a bright emblem of mercy—mercy in a state of incarnation. But it is only a Christian that has a clear idea of mercy as a living principle. Men in general do not feel their need of mercy at all. The Christian knows his need of it, and knows the reality of mercy as an attribute of God. As soon as the need of mercy becomes a living idea in the heart, it exerts a softening influence, it produces humility. It is possible to *talk* of mercy, and be proud, hatefully proud; but as soon as the need of mercy becomes a genuine operative principle, it makes the soul deeply, sweetly humble. It produces peace—peace between man's intellect and truth, between man's will and holiness, peace between man's desires and God's government. It is with the Christian as with the Temple. The glory of the Temple was within. It was externally glorious, but its true glory was the Shekinah, the indwelling of the Spirit of God. 2. *The Temple was a place of law.* The law was deposited in the ark, and it remained there until the wars with Titus. But leaving the history of the written law, turn to the indwelling of law in the heart of the Christian. Look at the significant words of inspiration—"This is the covenant I will make with thee, saith the Lord, I will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts." 3. *The Temple was a place for worship.* Worship is internal. In the Temple there was communion with the Divine presence; there was the light of the

Shekinah, there was the sacrifice offered, there the incense ascended. Have you seen or realized the Being you worship? God has made all things, as it were, double. There are dualities everywhere. We know that if the eye sees, it has external objects suited to its operation; if the ear hears, it has sounds to meet its capacity. Now, if we were simply matter, this would be all; but we are spirit, and there is something to answer to spirit. It is God! And by the Temple was taught the glorious truth that the Divine Spirit and human souls come together. The great work of Christ is to carry, in a living manner, the presence of God down into the human heart; to transfuse God's mind into the mind of man. It is repelling, it is resisting *this*, that will ruin men. This, then, is the main idea suggested, that the consecration of man as a temple is the work of God.

III. The erection of the Temple was a noiseless work. "There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building." Oh! the severity, the stillness, the quietness, of the growing up of this extraordinary edifice! The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. "A bruised reed will He not break; He shall not lift up nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street." The building up of the human soul as a temple is a quiet, noiseless work. There is very little religion where there is much bustle, very little religion where there is much ostentation. We shall not suffer by giving a little more time to deep, quiet, severe thinking, to secret communion with the unseen; to the inner unostentatious work of heart worship. This fellowship with ourselves and the indwelling Spirit of God is the essence of true religion, and the true idea of a spiritual temple. —*Caleb Morris.*

Verses 11-13. **The soul as the home of God.** 1. Is garnished with moral and spiritual virtues. 2. Is designed as a permanent dwelling (verse 13). 3. Is clustered with the memories of happy fellowships. 4. Is retained by continued obedience: disobedience involves desertion.

Verses 18, 22. "There was no stone seen; the whole house he overlaid with gold." **The strength and beauty of moral character.** 1. Moral character must be firmly based on a foundation of imperishable truth. 2. A strong, vigorous character is often hid under the veil of the brightest and tenderest graces. 3. Religion in its higher development is essentially aesthetical. 4. The church of God combines and exhibits every moral excellence. "Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary."

Verse 20. The construction of the Most Holy Place in the form of a perfect cube had, doubtless, its typical significance. It was an appropriate symbol of perfection. The solid cube, in whatever way it is set, is always upright, a perfect square on every side, and all sides and angles corresponding perfectly to each other. So this form of the inner sanctuary indicated that the Holy One of Israel dwelleth in perfection.

Verse 38. "Solomon began," says Wordsworth, "to build the temple in the flower-month, and finished the building in the fruit month. Such is the life of the church, and of every believer who is a temple of the Spirit. It b gins in flowers, but must end in fruit. The harvest is the end of the world."

— The temple of Solomon was not distinguished, like the temples of Thebes, for gigantic vastness, for it was not a very large structure, but rather for its harmonious proportions, its beauty and completeness of workmanship, and the excessive costliness of its materials. And the church, the spiritual house of the living God, is to be specially distinguished for the excellency and completeness of the elect and precious stones which are required to build it; for these are not the many that go in the broad way to destruction, but the comparatively few that find the way of life (Matt. vii. 13, 14).—*Whedon.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPLENDOUR OF SOLOMON'S BUILDINGS.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Solomon was building his own house thirteen years**—Because no previous building preparations had been made for the palace as for the temple, and there was less urgency about the king's house than that God's Holy Place should be prepared wherein He and His people might meet; and Solomon was more zealous in his work for Jehovah than for himself. Verse 2. **He built also, &c.** Lange, Michaelis, and others regard this "*house of the forest of Lebanon*" as the first of the various edifices composing the palace, not a separate summer residence on Lebanon. Probably his own house, this house of the forest of Lebanon, and the house for Pharoah's daughter, were sectional structures, unitedly forming one grand royal abode. Called the "*house of the forest of Lebanon*" on account of rows of cedar trees built together in its construction. It seems to have been an armoury (1 Kings x. 16, 17; Isaiah xxii. 8). Its form was apparently an open court, surrounded by colonnade and galleries; "the inner surface was used, no doubt, for assemblies of warriors, the body guard," &c. (*Lange*). Verse 6. **A porch of pillars**—This was the second division of the palatial edifice, and formed the Court of Judgment; in the rear of the porch of pillars, which was an extended colonnade, was located this "porch of judgment" (verse 7), where the "throne" stood. Verse 8. **Solomon made also a house for Pharaoh's daughter**"—This, according to Eastern custom, would be not a building distinct from the king's house, but a rear part of it, although a structure complete in itself. *Jamieson* arranges this complex edifice thus: the building itself was oblong, consisting of two square courts, flanking a large oblong hall which formed the centre, and was properly the *house of the forest of Lebanon*, being the part where were the cedar pillars of this hall. In front was the *porch of judgment*. On the one side this large hall was the *king's house*; on the other, the royal *apartments for Pharaoh's daughter*. Verse 13. **Fetched Hiram out of Tyre**—He seems to have been eminent among the artists in metals for which Tyre and Phœnicia were then renowned. This man (of like name with the king) is designated in 2 Chronicles ii. 13, by the title of honour אָב—*i.e.*, master, teacher, father (*Keil*). His genius was a natural gift of God (verse 14). Note the difference between this phrase concerning Hiram, "*filled with wisdom*," &c., and the statement as to the supernatural endowments of Bezaleel (Exod. xxxi. 3), "filled with *the Spirit of God*, in wisdom," &c. Verse 15. **Pillars of brass eighteen cubits high**—These columns were 32½ feet long, without the capitals, and 7 feet in diameter; the metal was about 3½ inches thick (Jer. lii. 21), and the total weight of each pillar must have been about 18 tons. The capitals were over 8 feet high (verse 16), making a total height of 41 feet. Verse 21. **Jachin** and **Boaz**—יָכִין means *established* (2 Chron. xvii. 5); while בֹּעַז is a compound of עֹז power, strength, and בּוֹ in him—*i.e.*, in God; ergo, *strong in Him* (Isa. xlv. 24). Verse 23. **Molten sea**"—יָם; colossal brazen basin 17½ feet in diameter, over 8 feet in depth, capable of holding nearly 20,000 gallons of water. Verse 25. **Stood upon twelve oxen**—of enormous size necessarily—similar to the Assyrian bulls; for the total combined weight of the vessel and water would be some 100 tons. Verse 40. **Lavers**, for carrying away water; **shovels**, for removing ashes; **basins** for receiving the blood of sacrifices. Verse 45. **Bright brass**—מְמֹרָט, polished after the casting; brilliant, therefore. Verse 46. **In the plain of Jordan . . . between Succoth and Zarthan**—Here the soil is stated to be entirely *marl*. "Succoth," close by the mouth of the Jabbok; "Zarthan" (or Zaretan), whose site is uncertain, except that it was proximate to the Jordan, was near by Succoth. The distance from Jerusalem was considerable; but all the noxious smoke and vapours of the foundry would thereby be avoided; although the clay and sand found there doubtless determined the choice of the spot. Verse 47. **Solomon left all the vessels**—The word *unweighed* is wisely inverted in the translation, for וַיַּנַּח means he *let them be*; the number was so great that their weight was not computed. Verse 48. **And Solomon made, &c.**—As Hiram was equally "skilful to work in gold" (2 Chron. ii. 14), it is most probable that the king entrusted this work also to him. Verse 51. **The things which David his father had dedicated**—From 1 Chron. xxii. 14-16, xxix 2 *sq.*, we find that David's store of gold, silver, &c., was vast, including the valuable trophies of his victories (*cf.* 2 Sam. viii. 7, 11, 12; 1 Chron. xviii. 7, 10, 11), and his own private treasures (1 Chron. xxviii. 13-18). So abundant was the supply of precious metal that, although the quantity used for the temple was immense, there was a large store in reserve.—W. H. J

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-12.

THE ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PALACE OF SOLOMON.

The group of buildings described in these verses constituted one and the same royal palace. It included several edifices within itself. The principal one was the great hall of state, encased in cedar, and so called "the House of the Forest of Lebanon" (verse 2). In front of it was reared a pillared portico (verse 6). Between this portico and that part of the palace which was set apart for the royal residence was a cedar porch of exquisite proportions and surpassing beauty, called the Porch of Judgment (verse 7). Adjoining these erections, separated by an inner court, was the residence of the king; and beyond this, and connected with it, was the house of his Egyptian consort, built after the gorgeous pattern of the porch of cedar (verse 8). This magnificent pile of buildings was surrounded with a spacious court, decorated with a colonnade of stones and cedar (verse 12). The palace of Solomon was thirteen years in building: the Temple of the Lord was erected in seven. We should ever manifest more zeal and eagerness in prosecuting the work of God than in making provision for our material comfort. The results of Christian work remain when the most imposing fabrics of human pride and luxury have crumbled into ruin. The palace of Solomon suggests the following reflections.

I. That religion is not inimical to, but promotive of, the highest art. The iconoclasm that would destroy every vestige of a work of art, because of its possible abuse in matters religious, is the fruit of the reckless barbarism of a barbarous age. In all great reforms, whether in the Church or in the State, it is difficult to prevent excesses: there are always some wild extremists who commit enormities that bring discredit upon the best of causes. Religion has often suffered in reputation by the rude vandalism of a few; and the Church of God has been held up to scorn as the enemy of the arts and sciences. And yet it is evident to the thoughtful that religion has ever been the foster-mother of true genius: she inspires the noblest and purest conceptions, and supplies the most exalted themes for the pen, the pencil, or the chisel. In all ages, whatever has been grandest in architecture, most exquisite in painting, most chaste in statuary, and most celebrated in song, may be traced to the influence of the religious spirit. It is only religion that saves the arts and sciences from becoming the ministrants of the most revolting vices.

II. That it is the duty of the king to defend and maintain the best interests of his people. In the royal palace were deposited the weapons of war, the targets and shields of beaten gold (ch. x. 16, 17). Thus was set forth the mission of the king against his enemies—his protecting war-strength. In the Porch of Pillars, sometimes called the Tower of David—apparently hung over the walls outside, as was the custom in many warlike cities, were a thousand golden shields, which gave the whole palace the name of the Armoury. "With a splendour that outshone any like fortress, the tower with these golden targets glittered far off in the sunshine like the tall neck, as it was thought, of a beautiful bride, decked out after the manner of the East, with strings of golden coins. Five hundred of them were made by Solomon's orders for the royal guard; but the most interesting were the older five hundred which David had carried off in his Syrian wars from the guard of Hadadezer, as trophies of arms and ornaments, in which the Syrians specially excelled. It was these which, being regarded as spoils won in a sacred cause, gave, in all probability, occasion to the expression 'the *shields* of the earth belong unto

God.'" When the Israelites first desired a king, one important purpose was that he might go out before them and fight their battles (1 Sam. viii. 20): and they would be reminded of this every time they gazed upon the glittering shields of the royal armoury. A good monarch makes the best welfare of his people his constant study; and he is ever ready to protect them from the assaults and ravages of the foe. William the Silent, of Holland, devoted all his treasures and talents with such self-denying bravery in defending and delivering his oppressed countrymen, that "as long as he lived, he was the guiding star of a brave nation; and when he died, the little children cried in the streets."

III. That the administration of justice is an essential part of good government. The most attractive portion of the palace of Solomon was the Porch of Judgment, in the interior of which the throne was erected. It represented the royal elevation and majesty, and signified the vocation of the king in judging and ruling his subjects. "This porch," writes *Stanley*, "was the gem and centre of the whole empire, and was so much thought of that a similar likeness to it was erected in another part of the royal precinct for the queen. Within the porch itself was to be seen the king in state. On a throne of ivory brought from Africa or India, the throne of many an Arabian legend, the kings of Judah were solemnly seated on the day of their accession. From its lofty seat, and under that high gateway, Solomon and his successors after him delivered their solemn judgments. That porch, or gate of justice, still kept alive the likeness of the old patriarchal custom of sitting in judgment at the gate; exactly as the gate of justice still recalls it to us at Granada, and the Sublime Porte—the Lofty Gate at Constantinople. He sat on the back of a golden bull, its head turned over its shoulder, probably the ox or bull of Ephraim; under his feet, on each side of the steps, were six golden lions, probably the lions of Judah. This was the seat of judgment. This was the throne of the house of David." Where justice is perverted, the nation suffers; government is impossible, and the people become the victims of a sateless avarice, or a cruel tyranny. "The king by judgment establisheth the land;" but when "the law is slacked and judgment doth never go forth," disorder and anarchy ensue.

IV. That magnificence in architecture is a substantial evidence of national prosperity and culture. Temporal aggrandisement was an important element in the blessing that Jehovah had promised the Jews on condition of their obedience. In consequence of their own sins, they had tasted the bitterness of the warning, but not till now did they attain the full glory of the promise. To preclude the possibility of the objection being raised that the motive of reward had not been tried in God's dealings with His people, they are favoured for a brief period with the material splendour and religious progress of the era of Solomon. Their public buildings, in temple, palace, and fortresses; their enriching and extended commerce; their splendid apparel and sumptuous banquets, were unmistakable indications of the wealth, luxury, and refinement of the times. "Kings and princes cannot, on account of their high position, choose to live in ordinary houses, or yet in poor hovels; it is simply folly to reproach them when they build castles for themselves. The building of palaces becomes sinful and blameable only when they are built for the gratification of ostentation and insolence, or at the expense of a poor and oppressed people."

V. That regal and national aggrandisement is fraught with many dangers. 1. *There is the danger of unguarded pride.* Few could bear the popularity which Solomon reached, or resist the temptations to which he was exposed. All that the world most highly prizes were at his disposal—wealth, power, beauty, knowledge. He is not the first whose brain has been turned by

a plethora of wordly abundance. "Great riches," says Lord Bacon, "have sold more men than ever they have bought out." 2. *There is the danger of an enfeebling indulgence.* At the bottom of every sparkling cup of pleasure is the bitter dreg—satiety. To revel in the voluptuousness and sin which unlimited wealth may furnish, destroys the very capacity for enjoyment. The pleasure is still pursued long after it has ceased to be a pleasure; and the unsatisfied votary has to moan

> O! pleasures past, what are ye now,
> But thorns about my bleeding brow:
> Spectres that hover o'er my brain,
> And aggravate and mock my pain!

3. *There is the danger of a disastrous and irreparable decay.* It is sad to observe amid the gayest bloom of national or individual life the withering leaves of approaching and inevitable decline. At the brightest noonday of Solomon's glory the coming shadow of his fall was already discernible. Worldly prosperity is "like a river that beareth up things light, and drowneth things weighty and solid." Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

LESSONS:—1. *The most imposing scene of earthly greatness is but temporary in its duration.* 2. *The greater the treasures of a nation, the greater is the responsibility of the ruler.* 3. *The religious life of a nation is the most precious possession, and in its results the most enduring.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 13—51.

RELIGION AND ART.

Solomon determined to offer the best to God—the best in material, the best in form. He desired to have real works of art, and he so little despised art as the handmaid of religion, that he even sent for a heathen and foreign artist. In his wisdom, he regarded the command, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image," not as the prohibition of every species of religious sculpture. As Hiram's mother was an Israelite, we may well surmise that he was not unacquainted with the God whom his mother worshipped, and, therefore, would be better able than all other Tyrian artists to enter into the right spirit and meaning of the works which Solomon entrusted to him. The elaborate decoration of the Temple, and the exquisite finish of its furniture as detailed in these verses, suggest several reflections as to the relation of Religion and Art.

I. Art imbibes its best inspirations from religion. Hiram "was filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass" (verse 14). The genius of art is a divine endowment. The skill of Hiram is referred to nearly in the same terms as that of Bezaleel (Exod. xxxi. 3); but in the case of the latter it was a supernatural inspiration for a special purpose, while in the case of Hiram it was a natural gift of God. Like all true genius, it possessed the soul of the artificer with an irrepressible passion for his particular work. He was *filled* with wisdom and ingenuity to *work*. It is a dangerous, and often fatal infatuation, when a man dreams he is a genius, and does nothing more but dream. The greatest genius is he who has the greatest capacity for hard work, and who finds his greatest pleasure in it. The artist is ever an enthusiast. When Macready acted Romeo for the first time—being then only sixteen years of age—his success was so great that a host of friends crowded round him at the close, and shook his hand with fervent congratulations. A lady asked him, "Well, sir, how do you feel now?" and he, with a boyish

ingenuousness, answered—"I feel as if I should like to act it all over again!" How much more pure and lofty should be the enthusiasm of the Christian artist!

II. Art fulfils its loftiest mission when it is consecrated to religious uses. All this wealth of metal and of talent was employed in building and embellishing the Temple of Jehovah. It is a sad and pitiful sight to see the leaders of art and science lending their great powers in antagonism to religion. And yet it is reassuring to know that the greatest minds, and those who have had the greatest influence in moulding the best thoughts of the world, have ever been among the most devout. Copernicus, whose system of the universe overthrew the delusion of many thousand years, was no enemy of religion. His tomb bears the following characteristic inscription:—

> "I crave not the grace which Paul received,
> Nor the favours with which Thou didst indulge Peter;
> That alone which Thou bestowedst upon the thief on the cross,
> That alone do I entreat."

Kepler, Newton, and many others who were giants in the realm of science, were humble and zealous Christians. Genius gains its most entrancing visions, glitters with its brightest radiance, wins its most resplendent victories, and scatters its choicest blessings, when it devotes its best powers to expound and adorn religion.

III. Religion combines what is beautiful in art with all that is vigorous and substantial in principle. The Temple was firmly founded, massive and durable in structure, graceful and brilliant in ornamentation. The great Creator has so exquisitely proportioned His external dwelling-place that there is everything about it to delight the eye and gratify and elevate the taste. He has stamped upon it all the glory of form, irradiated it with all the brilliance and softness of colour, and finely attuned it to all the rapture and harmony of sound. The masterpiece of the most gifted artist is but a dim, imperfect reflection of the native, peerless beauty of the universe. Jehovah is said to "clothe Himself with light as with a garment;" and what are all His created works but a garment, jewelled with stars, embroidered with constellations, and heavy with the riches of all worlds? The Being whose self-created Temple is so full of grandeur and beauty is worthy of the most gorgeous sanctuary that the hand of man can fashion. The ocean loses none of its power because it is silvered with fretted foam, or sparkling with the golden sheen of reflected sunbeams. The mountain is not less majestic because it is belted with the feathery-branched pines, garlanded with slender wild flowers, and clothed with a purple robe of blooming heather. Nor does the religious hero lose anything in strength and stature because he wears "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

IV. Art becomes dangerous and misleading when it usurps the place of religion. The principle laid down and developed by Neander is the true one—that the design of the Christian religion, which is to promote holiness of life, should be kept constantly in view; and whatever is beautiful in art should ever be subordinated to this design. When the beautiful becomes, or tends to become, supreme in worship and in Christian art, then it becomes unlawful. Whenever this principle is infringed, an intense desire to reform is apt to develop itself into a reckless, iconoclastic spirit. The men who denuded and dismantled the churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries regarded ornaments as snares to the conscience, and as the foster-nurses of superstition. Religion admits of no rival: she must be supreme, and all the meretricious graces of art

must be subservient to her sway, and minister to her high and beneficent purpose. Art is one of the noblest and best gifts which God has bestowed on man; therefore, above all, it should be applied to the glorification of God, and not merely to the sanctification and pleasure of the world. To scorn and reject art in the service of religion is to reject Him who has given it. The aesthetics of the Christian life must not be permitted to mar or displace its spiritual power.

LESSONS:—1. *The best talent should be employed for God.* 2. *A genuine Christian life is adorned with the beauty of many virtues.* 3. *Art without religion is idolatry and sin.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSE 22.

LILY WORK.

While, for convenience sake, this is called Solomon's Temple, it is much more David's; but in the highest sense it is God's—God's thought, which He put into the soul of David, and fed by His holy aspirations and musings. And about this divinely-suggested Temple, with all its several items of grandeur and device, there is nothing more distinctly characteristic than the idea which gleams forth from this description of the pillars built by Hiram—"Upon the top of the pillars was lily work;" an illustration, moreover, of that work, also David's, into which he threw his thought, not only about the material Temple, but about all Divine realities—"Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary." The pillars, how massively grand, towering, and sublime, yet fretted over and crowned with gracefulness! Even "lily work" of choicest artifice.

I. As we look at these pillars, we cannot fail to remember that *the man who built them threw his soul into them.* And his soul was inspired to do the best his hands could. How immensely it would relieve the drudgery of manual occupation if our workers were to feel that their true work was an inspiration—that the thought of it, and the power to do it, were alike from God, and that they were doing it for God? Would not this make them, also, do their daily duty as indeed for God? In that Temple all was to be good and sound. Men felt it was all for God, and so they put their souls into it. The one thought seemed to be, How shall we most fitly express our sense of the Divine worth? And to an age largely impressed by material signs and symbols this was a testimony of some value. It was looked upon as a Divine gift to have a faculty for skilful workmanship. In these days it is to be feared that our loose thought about what constitutes the soul of religion has led to some disparagement of these so-called natural gifts. It needs to be told with much plainness to the so-called Christian people of this day, that they are not honouring God if, however devout and prayerful, they neglect their proper every-day work. To serve God is not simply to be rapt by religious emotions. He who makes a boot, or drives a nail, or executes a design skilfully, may do it religiously. And we might say to the workers, It is to be feared that we of the pulpit sometimes needlessly disparage your toil, and make it harder than needs be, because we do not sufficiently allow that a true glory rests about all honest, well-wrought toil. The true sanctification of labour will never be attained until we allow that a good work may be as truly wrought by painstaking and skill in the commonest engagements. We must do our best, because we are doing it for our Lord. Christ takes note of all conscientious, painstaking endeavour, and whatever is well done, conscientiously done, is done for Him. Believing that in the simple work-a-day matters of conscientiousness and painstaking about our daily calling it is within our power to please or grieve Him, let us give Him our best.

II. Following closely upon this is a thought about *the soundness and honesty of service in God's Spiritual Temple.* All work that is worth doing at all is worth doing well. If a man has to give, let him give cheerfully, for God loveth a cheerful giver. If he has to teach, let him give himself in the teaching; if he has to rule a household, let him do so with diligence. Let his service be not by constraint but willingly. A cup of cold water is not unacceptable, but meat may sometimes be more serviceable, therefore more acceptable. A prayer for the troubled is good, but a suffering patience is better. This high, grand principle would effectually rectify at least some of the wrongness of the Christian church. Well doing is in doing one's best. A really spiritual endeavour is an endeavour in which the spirit of a man shows itself, as in a good painting a man's soul peers through the canvas. Whether, therefore, in one's own soul-culture, or in the culture of spiritual life in others, we should not present a maimed sacrifice, when we ought to and can offer an unblemished one. Let all our works be done in truth. Let them bear the inspection of the eye of Heaven. However laborious, let them be finished; if pillars, let the top be chased with "lily-work."

III. But passing away from these general thoughts suggested by the scene of these varied works in the Temple, let us come to another. If upon the top of Hiram's pillars was "lily-work," so *majesty, crowned with gracefulness, will be found in all the Divinest thoughts.* Religion is one of these Divine thoughts. Revelation is to provoke religious life; and in religious life there is strength as well as beauty, beauty as well as strength. "Upon the top of its pillars is lily-work." In "Theophilus Trinal" the words are applied to the frame of Nature, thus:—"How mighty and massive is Nature's frame! Strong are the world's pillars! Yet what profusion of things graceful, even sportively graceful, does the earth contain! Beautiful is the 'lily-work.'" This great Temple—the world is like that old Temple—the wonder of Solomon's heart and time. "Upon the top of the pillars is lily-work." In all God's works will be found a perfect harmoniousness; so there is as truly in the sphere of the spiritual within man the same blending of the strong with the beautiful. The massiveness of the religious principle which it takes time to establish and to build up is adorned with many a grace, and crowned with many a flower-picture.

IV. The pillars must be before the florid ornamentation. That which is essentially Divine must have elements of strength and stability. The force which is to control a man's inner and outer being must—being a Divine force—be an overcoming one. There is muscle and sinew and bone in all healthily embodied life. It must be able to resist and assert itself. Moral cowardice, *e.g.*, cannot co-exist with a healthy spiritual life; hence the repeated exhortations in Scripture to "be strong," to "be very courageous." The muscular school of Christianity, as it is called, has done some good if it has only helped to explode the notion that religion is an effeminate thing; but it has not always chosen the best modes of exemplifying its principles.

Strong are the pillars of God's spiritual temple, deeply laid the foundations, in force of principle, in power of life. Pity the man who is wanting in these, whose religion is sentiment and nothing more. Presently some blast will tear up the roots of such a life, and lay the lifeless trunk bare to the scorn of all beholders. But *beauty* is also in God's sanctuary, and "upon the top of the pillars was lily work"—one of its simplest illustrations. Nature in this respect furnishes us a series of types. Her vegetation which clothes those rugged peaks, climbing ever where it can to adorn and beautify, tells of some thought of God, to be applied to spiritual ideas. To the devout, all such contemplation of the works of God will result in an ever-deepening conviction that while God loves the strong, He also loves the graceful. Similarly, out of the settled, rock-like principles of religious faith spring many a beautiful plant of grace.

Attention to the minor moralities, the tender, graceful offices of Christian gentleness, is no unimportant phase of the sweetness of goodness. It is our joy when we can trace all things of worth to the Saviour; and, having taken the text from which to teach of the strength and beauty which God loves, we would turn with profound respect and gratitude to the Saviour of men as the source of all that is enduringly grand and vitally beautiful. Consider Christ—how settled and stable are the grand principles upon which His religion is founded! What strength you have in the elementary principles of the Christian religion! Yet what beauty! As in His life, so also in the life that is nurtured by faith in Him, you will find force and fragrance—whatever can give sustenance to the more heroic virtues; whatever can give nurture to the gentler graces. The pictures representing the Saviour mostly err in the direction of effeminacy. So also Renan's word-picture of Him is an exaggeration in this direction. And we are all apt, knowing how much of sweetness was in his nature, to forget the ruggeder virtues which dwelt within His manly breast. But we have only to come to the cross to get these effeminate notions corrected. He could "even dare to die,"—of such stalwart sort was His inner soul, and yet even from that cross could turn a look of pitying love toward the weeping woman by it, and say to John, "Behold thy mother."

And as in the human life and story of Christ, so also in the manifestations of Christ ever since; what brave endurance, what meek patience, have been seen! Strength, manly and courageous; beauty, touching, pathetic, graceful. Think of those pillars in Solomon's Temple—beautiful in their grandeur: they represent a true religious life—massive, towering, sublime; yet crowned with the graceful, wrought upon the top in "lily work." You are firm and true to principle: do not think you need be rude and ungainly. Let the "beauty of holiness" beam forth from you. Let not the sacredness of your life ever be forbidding—shine forth! Though possessed of the enduring vitalities of the hidden life, be also clothed in the comely garment of the Christian graces.

1stly. You, especially, who are seeking for something abiding—who yearn to be in your true place, a place not to be changed—you must *overcome*. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the Temple of my God." Have you overcome self-will, passion, worldly expediency? There is earnest work before you before this hope of heaven can be your enjoyment. In the strength of God and of his dear Son you will find the victory.

2ndly. *You who love the beautiful—where are you looking for it?* You find much baseness, lowness in yourself—in society. Look for it in Christ, and in that which springs from the acceptance of His service and yoke. "Come unto Me," all ye sons and daughters of pleasure, wearied with much seeking and never finding. "Come unto Me," all searchers after true consolation and joy: "I will give you rest."—C. W. P.

The Symbolic Teaching of the Temple.

When the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states that "the Law had a shadow of good things to come," he does not undertake to show that the several institutions and ceremonies of that legal period have their exact counterparts, in every particular, in the institutions of Christian times. Shadows are very indefinite and insubstantial things, erratic and uncertain in their movements, so that it is only with great difficulty and much patient observation that we can succeed in defining the substance they so dimly forecast. The symbolic character of the Levitical ritual has been often exaggerated. Old Testament persons and places, sacred seasons and sacred things, down even to the very snuffers and tongs of the sanctuary, have been strained into meanings the most fantastic, and have afforded scope for the play of the most fanciful imagination.

But while the typical and figurative teaching of the Bible is liable to be abused, it has ever been, and still is, a valuable and impressive medium of conveying the knowledge of the most important truths, especially if one of the fundamental rules of allegorical interpretation be observed—that which necessitates the rejection of everything inconsistent with the particular truth it is intended to unfold and illustrate. The Temple of Solomon, so far as it was a reproduction (on an enlarged scale) of the Tabernacle, was, like that more ancient structure, the pattern, example, and shadow of heavenly things. But Solomon introduced a number of additions to the ancient pattern shown to Moses in the Mount. The side-chambers, the colossal cherubim, the molten sea on twelve oxen in place of the more simple laver of the tabernacle court, the ten smaller lavers and their bases, the ten tables and the ten golden candlesticks—all seem to have been the product and expression of theocratic ideas that had been maturing in the Israelitish mind for more than four hundred years, though many of them were probably demanded by the more extensive and elaborate service of Solomon's time. The symbolic meaning of various parts of the Temple are worthy of consideration.

I. The Temple, as the dwelling place of Jehovah, localised the manifestation of His presence and power. Though Solomon was well aware "the heaven and heaven of heavens" could not contain the God of Israel, yet he built the Temple with the declared purpose of providing *a house for Jehovah to dwell in*—a settled place for His abode (viii. 3). He could, therefore, have entertained no such thought as that by dwelling in the Temple God ceased to be omnipresent; but the Temple was specifically the place where Jehovah recorded His name, and therefore the visible sign and pledge of His covenant with Israel. It was the abode of His holiness, the place where He was to be consulted and understood by His people—the place of vision and of glorious manifestation and blessing.

II. The Temple was symbolic of Heaven. While the Temple was specifically the dwelling place of Jehovah, it also typified heaven itself, which the Apostle designates "the true Tabernacle" (Heb. viii. 2; ix. 24). Accordingly, in Solomon's prayer at the dedication, we find a continued contrast between "this house," or "this place," and "heaven, Thy dwelling place," or simply "heaven" (chap. viii. 30-49). And so the pious Israelite might ever see in the holy and beautiful house where Jehovah recorded His name a type and symbol of heaven itself. It was the Temple of His holiness (Psalm v. 7; lxxix. 1; cxxxviii. 2).

III. The Temple indicated the close relationship existing between God and man. This divine human relationship was symbolised in the two main apartments of the Temple. Why, in the Temple as in the Tabernacle, have two holy rooms, rather than three or more? Why, except to express the twofold relation that essentially exists between the worshipper and God? The holy of holies, with its profound symbols of "Mercy covering wrath," showed God's relation to His people; how, and on what terms, the Almighty and Holy One would dwell with man. The holy place, where the consecrated priests ministered, with its incense, altar, and tables and candlesticks, expressed the relation of the true worshipper to God. The devout worshippers, who offer before God the incense of continual prayer, are at once the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And this is the one great truth embodied in the several symbols of the holy place. Thus, in the two main apartments, were exhibited "the two great branches into which the tree of Divine knowledge always of necessity runs—namely, the things to be believed concerning God, and the things to be done by His believing people."

IV. The Temple symbolised the gradual revelation of the Divine Holiness. When we come to observe the details of the structure we notice, first of all, the graduated sanctity of the three holy places. First, the court, where nothing unclean might enter; then the holy place, where only the consecrated priests might go to perform holy services; and, beyond this, vailed in thick darkness, the holy of holies, where only the high priest entered (and he but once a year) on the great day of atonement. Here was symbolised, not only the absolute holiness of Him who "dwelt in the thick darkness," but also the gradual and progressive revelations of His name and Nature, which have been made known to men. Whilst the Temple and the priesthood remained, the Holy Ghost signified that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest (Heb. ix. 8); but since Christ has rent the vail and entered heaven itself for us, we all may, with boldness and full assurance of faith, enter into the holiest, and have everlasting fellowship and communion with God (Heb. ix. 24; x. 19-22).

V. The square form of all the apartments and courts of the Temple is not without significance. The oracle was a perfect square, the nave a double square, the porch half a square, &c. Nowhere do we find the form of the triangle, the pentagon, or the circle; but everything about the sanctuary seems, like the heavenly Jerusalem, to be quadrangular, as if to correspond with the four corners of heaven, the upper dwelling place of God (Jer. xlix. 36; Matt. xxiv. 31).

VI. The Temple also had a symbolism of members. Especially noticeable is the predominance of the numbers ten and three. The length and breadth of all the apartments and the courts is a common multiple of ten—the number of the commandments written on the Tables of Testimony within the Ark. Ten is the number of the candlesticks and tables, the bases and the lavers; ten cubits was the height of the cherubim and the extent of their outstretched wings; ten cubits was the breadth of the molten sea. Then we note the *three* holy apartments, each with its type of expiation—the altar of burnt offerings, the altar of incense, and the mercy seat; the last within the most holy place, which bore the form of a perfect cube, the length and the breadth and the height of it being equal. Each apartment also had three principal kinds of articles of furniture. In the oracle were the cherubim, the ark, and the tables of the Law; in the nave were the candlesticks, the tables, and the altar of incense; and in the court were the brazen sea, the lavers, and the altar of burnt offerings. There were also the three stories of side-chambers. In this symbolism of numbers we may discern a mystic representation both of the variety and unity of all Divine revelation. "What happens thrice is the genuine once; what is divided into three is a true unity. The one dwelling, by its division into three parts, is designated as one complete whole; and the three kinds of articles of use which are in the three parts, or in one of them, again form a complete whole, and belong under it to the one or the other relation. While the number (ten) gives the impress of finishing and completing to multiplicity, the number (three) is the signature of perfect unity, and thus also of the Divine Being."

VII. The decorations of the Temple symbolised the Divine source of all forms of life. The cherubim, lions, oxen, palms, flowers, and lily work were representative of all created life, and signified that, while Jehovah condescended to make the Temple His special dwelling place, His presence fills the universe with life. He upholds all things by the Word of His power. Angels and men, cattle and creeping things and fowl, and all inanimate creation, have their being from Him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. And thus was added to the various lessons of Jehovah's absolute holiness and infinite perfections, which the Temple symbolised, this ornamental expression of His universal providence (see *Bahr* on "The Symbolism of the Mosaic Worship": *Whedon's* Comm., and *Lange*).

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1-51. In matter: all was here of the best. The wood was precious, sweet, lasting; the stones beautiful, costly, insensible of age; the gold pure and glittering. So are the graces of God's children excellent in their nature, dear in their acceptation, eternal in their use: so are the ordinances of God in His church holy, comfortable, irrefragable: so is the perfection of His glorified saints incomparable, unconceivable. In situation: the outer parts were here more common; the inner more holy and peculiarly reserved. One court of the temple is open to the unclean, to the uncircumcised: within that another, open only to the Israelites, and, of them, to the clean: within that yet another, proper only to the priests and Levites, where was the brazen altar for sacrifice, and the brazen sea for washing. The eyes of the laity might follow their oblations in hither; their feet might not. Yet more, in the covered rooms of the Temple there is, whither the priests only may enter, not the Levites; there is, whither the high priest only may enter, not his brethren. It is thus in every renewed man, the individual temple of God: the outer parts are allowed common to God and the world; the inwardest and secretest, which is the heart, is reserved only for the God that made it. It is thus in the church visible: the false and foul-hearted hypocrite hath access to the holy ordinances of God, and treads in His courts: only the true Christian hath entire and private conversation with the Holy One of Israel, he only is admitted into the Holy of Holies, and enters within the glorious vail of heaven.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 1-12. They who are great may appear so; it is as fit that a king should dwell in a palace, as a peasant in a cottage. They who are occupied in building should take care not to lose, in the stone and mortar, their solicitude to secure a better "house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

— The building of the house for the king followed immediately upon the building of the temple: they belong together. Altar and throne stand and fall together, even as we have the two commandments: Fear God: Honour the king (1 Pet. ii. 17; Prov. xxiv. 2). In the kingdom where religion is cherished and highly honoured, there royalty is most secure: a God-fearing people is the best, nay, the only support of the throne.—*Lange.*

Verse 13. As the tabernacle was built with the wealth of Egypt, so the temple with the wit of Tyre: God will serve himself by the common gifts of men.

Verse 13, 14. A wise prince, in the furtherance of his enterprise, which aims at the honour of God and the good of the nation, looks around for the best instruments, and in order to obtain them seeks them wherever he can find them (Prov. xxvi. 10). He who has learned anything thoroughly, and brought it to perfection in its especial province, must be sought out and held in esteem, whatsoever be his position or country.

Verse 15-22. The pillars of Hiram emblematic of the church of God. 1. *As to its stability.* The names given to the pillars are suggestive. Jachin: *He will establish*, referring to the fact that Jehovah's dwelling place, hitherto movable and moving, was now firmly fixed in the midst of His people. Boaz: *In him is strength*, indicating the strength and power that would be put forth by God in the defence and establishment of His people. The church is stable—1. Because it is founded in truth; 2. Built up in truth; and 3. Sustained and encompassed by the God of truth. II. As to its beauty. The pillars were surmounted with ornamental capitals, shaped like a full-blown lily-cup, with fine checkered network thrown over the whole, and delicate chain work hanging in festoons outside, and deco-

rated with circling rows of pomegranate. The church is adorned—1, with the graces of the Holy Spirit; 2, with the beauty of holiness; 3, with the reflected glory of its risen and glorified head (2 Cor. iii. 18). III. *As to its eventful history.* These famous pillars were broken in pieces by the Babylonians when they destroyed Jerusalem (2 Kings xxv. 13; Jer. lii. 17). But the material remained and retained its value. So the church has often been persecuted, pierced, and broken by the violence of its foes, and often brought disaster on itself by its unfaithfulness to God; but it has not been utterly destroyed. It retains its vigour, and is ever increasing in value and preciousness.

Verse 18. The pomegranate was one of the commonest ornaments in Assyria. It was used on quivers, on spear-shafts and mace-heads, in patterns on doorways and pavements. It is doubtful whether a symbolical meaning attached to it, or whether it was merely selected as a beautiful natural form.—*Rawlinson.*

Verse 22. The Hebrew named the lily simply "the white"; it is, therefore, a natural symbol of purity. The priests, as "the holy ones" (Ex. iii. 27), were dressed in white (Num. xvi. 7); and the high priest, the holiest of the holy, wore on the great day of atonement white garments instead of his usual many coloured ones; and these white robes were called "holy garments (Lev. xvi. 4, 32). Inasmuch as holiness was the characteristic and fundamental idea of the Israelitish religion, "the white" (*i.e.*, the lily) seems to have been their religious flower, as the lotus was the well-known sacred flower of the Indian and Egyptian religions. Besides this, the lily is nowhere more indigenous than in Palestine (Matt. vi. 28); and it may therefore be named the flower of the Promised Land, as the palm was its tree. If the capitals of the pillars were thus always and everywhere decorated with carvings of flowers, no more characteristic and suitable one could be chosen for the capitals before the holy temple than the lily.—*Lange.*

— "And upon the pillars was lily-work." To show the beauty and sweetness of Christ and His people, those especially that are more eminent, the glory of the churches; such as were James, Cephas, and John, who "seemed to be pillars" (Gal. ii. 9).

Verse 23. As a large laver for the priests to wash in (2 Chron. iv. 6). The Hebrews used to call the gathering together of much water a sea. It signifieth both the exceeding filthiness of sin, requiring a sea for the cleansing of it, and the infinite virtue of Christ's blood.—*Trapp.*

Verse 37. "All of them had one casting." To teach the uniformity about things of God. It is a sweet thing when with one mind and one mouth God is glorified as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xv. 6), and men's prayers come before Him "as the sound of many waters."

Verse 40-51. *What signification have the holy vessels of the temple for the church of the Lord, which is the true temple of God?* 1. The pillars, Jachin and Boaz, in the porch, are, as it were, the superscription over the temple, and declare its strong foundation and its permanence. The Lord declares both to His people church: upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. xvi. 18). Great, noble promise! II. The brazen sea and the vases in the porch are there, that the priests may purify themselves and the sacrifices which they bring there. The church of the Lord is that holy priesthood which offers spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. ii. 5). Those who wish to perform such service the prophet summons: Wash ye (Isa. i. 16); and the apostle: I beseech you, &c. (Rom. xii. 1). III. The altar, the candlesticks, and the table stand in the building itself, which is a type of heaven, and show that for them who offer themselves pure and holy sacrifices, a divine light and life are pre-

pared before the throne of God, and no other sacrifice is rendered except the incense of prayer, of praise, and worship of God (Ps. xvi. 11; Rev. v. 8-14).—*Lange.*

— If, from the walls, we look into the furniture: what is the altar, whereon our sacrifices of prayer and praises are offered to the Almighty, but a contrite heart? What is the golden candlestick, but the illumined understanding, wherein the light of the knowledge of God and His divine will shineth for ever? What the tables of shew-bread, but the sanctified memory, which keepeth the bread of life continually? Yea, if we shall presume so far as to enter into the very closest of God's oracle, even there, O God! do we find our unworthy hearts so honoured by thee, that they are made thy very ark, wherein thy royal law and thy pot of thy heavenly manna are kept for ever; and from whose propitiatory, shaded with the wings of thy glorious angels, thou givest the gracious testimonials of thy good Spirit, witnessing with ours that we are the children of the living God.—*Bp. Hall.*

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—In the Vatican Sept. this chapter commences: **And it came to pass when Solomon had made an end of building the house of the Lord, and his own house, after twenty years, then Solomon, &c.**; but no other authority sustains the addition. Eleven months elapsed between the completion of the Temple and its dedication; it being finished in the eighth month (chap. vi. 38), and opened in the seventh month of the following year (viii. 2). This delay was solely for the arrival of the Feast of Tabernacles, in the Jubilee Year, which happened the year ensuing. The commemoration of the nation having dwelt in booths in the wilderness (Feast of Tabernacles) was a fitting occasion for the consecration of the first permanent House of Jehovah; and their being assembled in large numbers gave a public dignity to the august event. Verse 1. **Then Solomon assembled**—The representatives of the nation were, by royal edict, summoned to their place in the procession which should attend the removal of the Ark into the Temple. The order would be: the king, elders of the people, priests bearing the Ark, Levites carrying the vessels. Progress must have been very deliberate, for along the line priests were stationed with sacrifices, and the procession paused while they were at intervals offered. Verse 4. **The Tabernacle of the congregation**—This אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד was the tent in which the Ark rested at Gibeon (*cf.* 1 Chron. xvi. 8, 9; xxi. 29; 2 Chron. i. 3), the original Mosaic tabernacle, in distinction from David's tabernacle for the Ark (*cf.* 2 Sam. vi. 17; 1 Chron. xv. 1). Verse 5. **Before the Ark, sacrificing**—The procession having reached the temple, the ark was laid down in the outer court, and a great sacrifice offered; then it was borne by the priests into the Oracle, and placed under the wings of the cherubim. *Note:* There were cherubim fixed upon the ark originally (Exod. xxxvii. 7-9); these, therefore, remained, and the colossal כְּרוּבִים of Solomon extended their wings over all. Verse 9. **Nothing in the ark, etc.**—In Heb. ix. 4 "the golden pot with manna and Aaron's rod" are mentioned in addition; but these were never *in* the ark, only "laid before the Lord" (Exod. xvi. 33; Numb. xvii. 10). Verse 10, 11. **Cloud filled the house, . . . glory of the Lord filled the house**—This "cloud" was not wholly dense darkness (as some suggest), but possibly dark clouds surrounding a resplendent glory; for when Aaron entered the holiest of the tabernacle the smoke of incense rolled itself around him, enveloping him as in a cloud, thus softening the overmastering splendour of the כְּבוֹד יְהוָה (Lev. xvi. 13). The כָּבוֹד of the O.T. answers to the δόξα of the N.T. Verse 12. **Dwell in the thick darkness**—A deeply solemn gloom which impressed beholders with a mysterious awe. As on Sinai (Exod. xx. 21 בָּעֲרָפֶל), so here בְּעֲרָפֶל corresponding to the Greek ὀρφνός. Verse 14. **King turned his face about**—with his back upon the people; he and they had been watching the movements of the glory cloud; now he faced the awed concourse. Verses 15-21 contain Solomon's address to the people, who listen standing, in which the king gratefully records that he undertook and completed the temple in obedience to Jehovah's word. Verses 22-53. **The Royal Prayer of Dedication**—"*Solomon stood before the altar*" on a brazen platform erected for the occasion (2 Chron. vi. 13) in front of the altar of

burnt offering; there, too, he knelt (verse 54), and with uplifted hands (verse 22) presented this sublime prayer before Jehovah. Verse 28. Prayer, supplication, and cry - תְּפִלָּה, תְּחִנָּה, רִנָּה are respectively *prayer in general* (whether praise, petition, or thanks), *entreaty* or supplication (petition for grace and help), and *praise* (prayer as the joyful expression of praise and thanks).—*Keil.* Verse 31. If any man trespass—Solomon here passes from general prayer, and begins to specify distinct cases. *Seven* particular cases are given in which God's merciful interposition would be needed: concerning the observation of the oath (31. 32), captives (33, 34), drought (35, 36), land plagues (37-40), strangers (41-43), Israelites when absent from Zion (44, 45), captives (46-50). Verses 51-53. A concluding argument by which Solomon urges his prayer. Verses 54-61. Solomon counsels and blesses the congregation—*He arose from the altar, . . . and he stood and blessed, &c.* Verse 61. Let your heart be perfect with the LORD, שְׁלֵמָה עִם יְהוָה; *uprightly* with Jehovah (Luther); *submissive* (Dr. Wette); *in friendship with God* (Gesenius); *undividedly given to the Lord* (Keil and Lange). Verses 62-64. The sacrificial act of consecration—These were the first offerings laid upon the sacred altar. The priests' court was not sufficiently extensive for such numerous sacrifices; therefore the king did "*hallow the middle of the court*" temporarily for sacrificial purposes. The immense number of sacrifices offered supplied for the prolonged "feast" which succeeded, lasting fourteen days, and to which assembled great multitudes, *from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt.* Verse 65. Hamath is the Grecian Epiphaneia, the principal city of Upper Syria, on the Orontes, the Northern frontier of Palestine (Numb. xiii. 21; xxxiv. 8). *The river of Egypt* is here, not the Nile, but the el Arish—the Southern boundary of the land of Israel (Numb. xxxiv. 5; Josh. xv. 4, 47).—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-9.

The Church the Sacred Depository of the Divine Word.

As the Tabernacle in the wilderness was solemnly consecrated to the worship of Jehovah (Ex. xl.; Num. viii.), so now must the grander house which is to supersede and supplant the tattered relics of the old system be dedicated with becoming solemnities to the same lofty purpose. And as Moses, the inspired servant of Jehovah, faithful in all his house (Num. xii. 7), was the chosen one to consecrate the tabernacle, so Solomon, the Divinely chosen King in Zion (1 Chron. xxviii. 6), in whose person the Hebrew monarchy at this time reached the highest summit of its glory, was the only proper person to consecrate the Temple. No priest could perform this holy service as properly as he. No other person in the realm had concentrated in himself at that time such sanctity, exaltation, and power. He was the type of that greater Solomon who is now silently building His spiritual Temple, and will Himself presently, at the time appointed, fill and hallow it with a cloud of glory that shall never pass away. The first step in the august ceremony was the removal of the ark from the tabernacle of David on Mount Zion to the Most Holy Place in the new Temple on Mount Moriah. And here the thought is suggested—that as the ark contained the tables of the Law, so the church is the sacred depository of the Divine Word.

I. The Divine Word is the irresistible rallying cry of a whole nation (verses 1, 2). The fiery cross of the Scottish Highlanders, or the gory morsels of the slaughtered oxen distributed throughout the coasts of Israel by the warlike Saul, were not more potent in mustering the militant hosts of the nation, than was the mention of the ark of God in gathering the Hebrew people to one common centre. The leading men of the nation at once obeyed the summons (verse 1). The *elders* included, more particularly, the chosen representatives of the nation; the *heads of the tribes* were the leading and most influential individuals; and the *chiefs*, or princes, *of the fathers*, were the most distinguished and saintly old men

of the nation, whose presence and approbation were indispensable at so important an event as the dedication of the Temple. "Nothing can be nobler than to see a whole nation, from the highest to the lowest, gathered in unity round its holiest possession." It is the Word of God that makes the most profound impression on the national heart, and that shapes and determines the national destiny.

II. The Divine Word is the infallible directory in all true worship. 1. *It recognises the office of sacred persons* (verses 3, 4). The priests and the Levites are mentioned indiscriminately. The parallel passage in the Chronicles says that "the Levites took up the ark;" but there is no contradiction in this, for all priests were Levites, though all Levites were not priests. Priests bore the ark across the Jordan and around Jericho (Joshua iii. 6; vi. 6). These persons were specially set apart to this sacred work, according to the requirements of the law (Num. iv. 15; Deut. xxxi. 9). Inattention to the divinely-prescribed order was followed by fatal results (compare 2 Sam. vi. 1-7; 1 Chron. xv. 12, 13). To be bearers of the Word of God, to set up the mercy seat in the sanctuary, and to point perishing sinners to the sprinkled blood, is the office and the glory of God's ministers. Office has nothing sacred in itself, apart from the faithful performance of the duties it involves, and the irreproachable moral character of the person appointed to it. Priestly assumption is the most unwarrantable, and, in the sight of God, the most abhorrent. 2. *It limits the significance of sacred things* (verse 4). It would appear that on this great inauguration day two imposing processions were formed: the one coming from the height of Gibeon, bearing aloft the sacred tent, and the holy vessels of the old pastoral worship, now to be disused for ever—the ancient brazen altar, the candlestick, the table of shew-bread, and also the brazen serpent. This procession was joined on Mount Zion by a still more imposing and stately one, bearing the ark of acacia-wood, covered with its two small winged figures—the one relic that was to unite the old and new together. Much has been made of these sacred vessels, until they have been raised into objects of idolatry. Starting with a certain modicum of truth, the enthusiastic lover of types and figures has wandered into regions unheard of and untrod before, and discovered hidden meanings and mysterious premonitions which the obvious use and common-sense teaching of the symbols utterly failed to convey. By a careful comparison of the Word of God we are taught the true significance and appropriate use of these sacred things, and of all external aids in the acceptable worship of God. 3. *It authorizes the exercise of sacred acts* (verse 5). The removal of the ark was celebrated by sacrifices of "sheep and oxen that could not be numbered for multitude." The road, according to Josephus, was flooded with streams of blood. The air was darkened and scented with the clouds of incense; the songs and dances were unintermitted. No worship can be acceptable to God apart from sacrifice. The Divine Word is most explicit on this point (compare Lev. i. 2; iii. 2, 7; Gen. viii. 20; xxii. 7; Ex. xviii. 12; xl. 29; Num. xxviii. 10, 14; 1 Kings iii. 4; Ps. li. 16, 19; Isa. xl. 16; Heb. x. 6-8, &c.). The vilest sinner can now approach God through the ever-efficacious sacrifice of His Son. Every act of genuine worship involves sacrifice. Our whole self, and the best of everything we have, should be freely sacrificed to Him who gave Himself for us.

III. The Divine Word finds its permanent home in the holiest place of the Church. 1. *There it is securely guarded* (verses 6, 7). The ancient lid of the ark formed by the two small cherubim of beaten gold was removed, and a new one, without them, was substituted to fit its new abode. On a rough unhewn projection of the rock the ark was thrust in and placed lengthways, under the shadow of the outspread wings of the two gigantic cherubim which were

waiting, like two watchful and stalwart guardians, to receive and evermore protect the precious treasure. "The Word of the Lord is under Divine protection; the angels are its guardians and watchers; it can neither be destroyed by human power, nor is it aided or protected by men." The holiest church is the most faithful custodian of the Word, and the holiest heart is its safest and most beauteous shrine. 2. *There it is intended to remain* (verse 8). When the ark moved within the veil to be seen no more, the retiring priests, as a sign that it had at length reached "the place of its rest," and was not to be carried about any more, drew forth from it the staves or handles on which they had borne it to and fro; and, although the staves themselves remained within the veil, the ends could just be seen protruding through the door, in token that its long wanderings were over; or, as Keil puts it, their ends could be observed from the sanctuary by the elevations on the vail, which might be seen from the sanctuary itself, but not without. They remained long afterwards, even to the later days of the monarchy, and formed a lane to guide the steps of the Chief Priest as he entered in the darkness. The Word of God has found its permanent home in His church, and the history of the two are inseparably bound together. Not long ago there was discovered among the hardened lava of Pompeii the form of a human body, with all the features singularly perfect and strikingly beautiful, and the expression as of one who was sleeping a pleasant and placid sleep. The burning flood, which carried death in its impetuous flow, and the cold entombment of eighteen hundred years, had not availed to destroy the imperishable lineaments. So the church may be exposed to the fiery persecution of her cruellest enemies, or buried under the cold neglect of her professed friends; but cast in the mould of the undying and unchanging Word of God, she retains her indestructible image, with every line and feature of perfection distinctly marked, and, when ages have rolled away, will stand forth to an astonished world in all her peerless beauty and greatness. 3. *There it is the most highly prized treasure.* "There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone" (verse 9). When the old lid of the ark was taken off before it disappeared within the vail, and before the new covering was fixed on, the interior of the ark was seen by Israelitish eyes for the first time for more than four centuries, perhaps for the last time for ever. The pot of manna, the rod of Aaron, and the golden censer, which were said to be laid up within it, or beside it, were gone—lost, it may be, in the Philistine captivity. Nothing remained but the two granite blocks from Mount Sinai, graven with the ten commandments. But these were of unspeakable value and unmistakable significance. "The ark of the covenant was the root and kernel of the whole sanctuary: it contained the moral law, at once the original document and pledge of the covenant, through which, and in consequence of which, Jehovah was to dwell in the midst of His people. We have, in the New Covenant, not only the Law, but the Gospel, which is everlasting. Where His Word is, there the Lord dwells and is enthroned; it is the soul of every House of God, and, indeed, gives it its consecration."

LESSONS:—1. *The Word of God should be fervently loved.* 2. *Diligently studied* 3. *Jealously guarded.* 4. *Faithfully obeyed.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Solomon decked and garnished his temple before he prayed in it; so, saith one, before thou prayest prepare thy heart, which is the true temple of Him who is greater than Solomon. And as that woman who sought her groat swept the whole house, so when thou seekest anything of God, sweep the whole house of thy heart: sweep it by repentance, wash

the pavement of it with tears, beautify it with holiness, perfume it with prayers, deck it with humility, hang it with sincerity.—*Trapp.*

— There seems to be a contrast here between the more popular proceedings of David, who, when he brought up the ark to Mount Zion, "gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand," and the statelier, more aristocratic system of his son, who, born in the purple, conducts himself in a loftier way, merely summoning the chief men as representatives of the nation. The rest of the people "assembled themselves" (verse 2), and were mere spectators of the ceremony.

Verse 1-4. **Religion the mightiest force in the nation.** 1. *It is the source and safeguard of regal authority.* The ruler who ignores the religious principle has no guarantee for a sound and permanent government. Stronger than the sword, or the schemes of statecraft, or the popular cry of the hour, is the deep-rooted religious life of the people. 2. *It commands the homage and allegiance of all ranks and conditions.* All that is venerable in age, ripe in wisdom and counsel, brilliant in genius, vigorous and daring in manhood, or blooming and hopeful in youth, respond at once to its irresistible call (verse 1, 2). 3. *It commemorates and consecrates great national blessings* (verse 2). "The feast in the month Ethanim" was the Feast of Tabernacles. Ethanim is defined as "the month of flowing streams," and corresponded with our October; it also signifies ripeness or strength. Solomon finished the Temple in the eighth month, but waited till the seventh month of the next year for the dedication, that it might be coincident with the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was designed for a thanksgiving and rejoicing over the fruits of the harvest (Ex. xxiii. 16; Deut. xvi. 13); and also for a commemoration of the time when Israel dwelt in booths in the desert (Lev. xxiii. 43). It was therefore fitting to associate the dedication of the temple with this important feast, for the ark that had dwelt in a tabernacle and been carried to and fro for five hundred years was now to enter into its place of rest (compare 1 Chron. xxviii. 2; 2 Chron. vi. 41). And so the holy house, begun in the month of flowers and finished in the month of garnered fruits, was appropriately consecrated in the month of thanksgiving. 4. *It venerates the most sacred objects* (verse 4). The ark, the tabernacle, and the holy vessels had been associated with the most eventful eras in the history of the Israelites, in defeat and victory, in distress and joy. Sacred relics, while unworthy of idolatry in themselves, are often reminders of privileges and blessing in the past which the grateful soul would not willingly forget.

Verse 4. The tabernacle of the congregation, made by Moses, hitherto transportative and for many years severed from the ark, was now to be re-united and settled in the temple; as the saints, here tossed up and down, shall one day be in heaven, that habitation of God's holiness. Though neither the tabernacle, nor its holy vessels, were applied to any use in the temple, their sacred character made it fitting that they should be deposited within its precincts. Most probably they were placed in the treasury.

Verse 5. **Sacrifice the essence of acceptable worship.** 1. Was instituted in the earliest times. 2. Has been practised in some form by all nations in all ages. 3. Was most perfectly exemplified in the sufferings and death of the Son of God. 4. Is illustrated in generous gifts for religious purposes. 5. Demands the whole life and service of the individual believer.

Verses 6-8. **The ark an emblem of the human heart.** 1. As vivifying and adorning the most splendid creation of human genius. 2. As the hiding place for the Divine Word (Psa. cxix. 11). 3. As having affinity with angelical life. 4. As it exercises itself in showing mercy. 5. As it is the shrine of Divinest manifestations.

Verse 9. "There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone." The imperishable nature of the Divine Word. 1. It is superior to its most magnificent surroundings. 2. It remains when other precious things are lost. 3. It survives the wreck and ruin of the mightiest empires. 4. It is not in the power of men or devils to destroy it. 5. It will endure when earth and sea and stars have vanished.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 10-13.

THE CLOUD OF THE LORD.

I. Was the visible symbol of the Divine Presence in the midst of His people. The word *shechinah*, though not used in the Bible, is frequently employed by writers on sacred subjects to designate this remarkable appearance, the creation of His power "whose strength is in the clouds," and of whom it is said that "clouds and darkness are round about Him, while righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne." From various references to it in the Scriptures we gather that the Shechinah was an intensely brilliant light, enclosed in a pillar-shaped cloud; that, during the day, this cloud would be so dense as almost entirely to conceal the light, but that at night it would become so attenuated and transparent as to leave the light alone visible. It might be, also, that the approbation or anger of Jehovah would be indicated at certain times by the changing aspects of unusual brightness or darkness. The recorded appearances of the God of Israel in the form of a cloud may have suggested to many heathen writers the manifestations of their own deities in a similar form. Thus, we read of Jupiter enthroned on Mount Gargarus "veiled in a fragrant cloud": of Minerva entering the Grecian army "clad in a purple cloud": and that, when Apollo attended a celebrated warrior, "a veil of clouds involved his radiant head." The first mention made of this remarkable spectacle—as if thrust out of space by some unseen hand—was on the memorable night of the exodus of the Israelites from their long vexatious bondage in Egypt. And it must surely have created a profound feeling of wonder and awe among that vast host of two millions and a half, as the mysterious glory-cloud floated down into their midst, and, proceeding to the front, majestically and silently assumed the leadership in their perilous journey. When the Tabernacle was reared and furnished to foster the spirit of worship, and to assist the growth and enlargement of the religious life, the cloud of the Lord covered and filled it with inexpressible glory. As Jehovah, in the old covenant, chose a visible dwelling among His people in token of their election, so also He verified His presence in this Temple of Solomon in a way cognizant to the senses—that is, through the CLOUD, which is the medium and sign of His manifestation, not only here, but all through the Old Testament. (Compare Ex. xvi. 10; xx. 21; xxiv. 15, 16; xxxiv. 5; xl. 34; Lev. xvi. 2; Num. xi. 25; xii. 5; Isa. vi. 3, 4; Ezek. i. 4, 28; x. 3, 4; Ps. xviii. 10-12.)

II. Indicated that the glory of the Divine character is beyond the comprehension of the human mind. The cloud concealed and veiled the majesty of Jehovah as well as revealed it. "The Lord said that He would dwell in the thick darkness" (verse 12). Cloud and darkness are synonymous words. The throne within the Temple, on which the Divine presence was concentrated, stood in the back part of the most Holy Place, which was perfectly dark. "The cloud is, then, on the one hand, the heaven-descended sign of the presence of the self-manifesting God; on the other hand, it declares that God, in His being, spiritually and ethically, is so far above and different from all other beings, that man, in his sinful and mortal nature, cannot comprehend nor endure the sight of Him." The glory of Jehovah that is unseen infinitely surpasses that which is visible (1 Cor. xiii. 12; Job. xxxviii.; Ex. ii. 20, 32)

III. Is the true consecration of every Christian sanctuary. Every Christian sanctuary is erected in the name and for the glory of Jehovah, and is intended for His dwelling place, His permanent home (verse 13). But the true consecration of the building is the manifested presence of God to the hearts of the worshippers. The Shechinah of the old dispensation was ever closely associated with the Tabernacle. It was not a spectacle simply to excite and gratify the amazement of the people, but was intended to assist them in the worship of the one living and true God (Ex. xl. 38). A sanctuary is to be consecrated, not with holy water and the mummery of Pagan rites and ceremonies, but with prayer and thanksgiving, with the Word and blessing of God. Wherever Jehovah manifests His glory, there is the consecrated Temple for His worship.

IV. Is sometimes manifested in overwhelming majesty and glory (verses 10, 11, compared with 2 Chron. v. 13, 14). The darkness was so insupportable, and the heavenly glory so overpowering, that the priests staggered under the awful manifestation, and were not able to minister. It is worthy of note, too, that the power of God came down while the worshippers were in the act of praising (*ib.* verse 13). When we rise to the highest pitch of sincerity and fervour in the worship of the Most High, it is then we receive the most memorable benedictions. The existence of the church to-day is a triumphant evidence of the continuance of the Divine presence and the special manifestations of the Divine glory. And, though we have not the pillar of fire glittering over the church as in days of yore, the power of God is realized in the person and government of the Holy Ghost, whose glory has been displayed in different periods of the church's history in a way every whit as wonderful and imposing, and with more extensive results than in the days when the mysterious outward sign attended the Israelites "throughout all their journeys." The miraculous effusion of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and the remarkable revivals which have occurred since that day, are signal examples and distinctive pledges of the plenitude and omnipotency of spiritual grace with which the church may expect to be visited in the present day. God is still in the midst of His people. When the world is convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; when believers are earnest in prayer and diligent in seeking the salvation of souls; when the careless and giddy are arrested in their whirl of gaiety, and become serious with thoughts of eternity; when the callous are melted, the obstinate persuaded, the doubting re-assured, and the despairing cheered; when the soul is humbled under a sense of personal unworthiness, and overwhelmed with views of the glory, the condescension, and the love of God; when the false confidences of the heart are shivered, and we are enabled to rely only on Jesus; when love glows with intense heat, and, under its fervid, constraining influence, we are led to consecrate ourselves afresh to God and to His great service—then have we unmistakable evidences of the presence and mighty operations of the Divine Spirit, that the *cloud of the Lord* is filling His Temple and descending into the midst of His worshipping people, in all the glory of His transcendent charms, in all the generous encompassing fulness of His outpoured blessing. Nothing short of the felt, spiritual presence of God—God realized in the heart by the energy of the Spirit—can be an effectual safe-guard against sin. The Jews *saw* the glory-cloud, the symbol of God's presence and guidance and power; it was "in sight of all the House of Israel throughout all their journeys;" it filled the Temple specially and solemnly dedicated to His worship; *yet they sinned*—sinned grievously and repeatedly. An awful commentary on the insufficiency of the most imposing outward symbolism to regenerate and sanctify corrupted human nature! It is the revelation of Christ to the heart by the Spirit that can alone accomplish the sin-destroying work.

LESSONS:—1. *The Temple is the place of glorious revelations.* 2. *It is in the highest moods of worship that the greatest blessings are read*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 10. By a cloud did God often both represent His glory, and cover it: signifying thereby that it was both invisible and unapproachable.

— The cloud—the visible symbol of the Divine presence, the Shechinah of the Targums—which had been promised before the ark was begun (Ex. xxix. 42), and had filled the Tabernacle as soon as it was completed (Ex. xl. 34), and which had probably been seen from time to time during the long interval when we have no express mention of it from a little before the death of Moses (Deut. xxxi. 15), to the present occasion, now once more appeared in full magnificence, and took, as it were, possession of the building which Solomon was dedicating. The presence of God in the Temple henceforth was thus assured to the Jews, and His approval of all Solomon had done was signified.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verses 10-13. It is impossible that mortal, sinful man should see or comprehend the Holy and Infinite One. I can experience His merciful presence; but presumption and folly it is to wish to sound the depths of His Being. The eye of faith beholds in darkness the glory of the Lord; in the night of the cross, the light of the world; through the dim veil of the flesh, the only begotten Son of God, full of mercy and grace.—*Lange.*

— The glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud, a dark cloud, to signify—1. The darkness of that dispensation in comparison with the light of the Gospel, by which, with open face, we behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord. 2. The darkness of our present state in comparison with the vision of God which will be the happiness of heaven, where the divine glory is unveiled. Now we can only say what He is not, but then we shall see Him as He is.

Verse 11. The holy angels clap their wings upon their faces, as it were a double scarf—or as a man doth his hands before his eyes, when he beholdeth an exceeding great light—before the brightness of God's presence, that would else put out their eyes. Pellican saith, by the priests being driven out by this cloud appearing was showed that the time should come when this priesthood should minister no more by carnal rites in this place.—*Trapp.*

— Not veneration for the Divine majesty alone forbids delay in the presence of the Divine glory; not merely a holy dread thrills through the priests, so that they draw back; but the glory of the Lord, like a consuming fire, is that before which unholy man cannot exist, to which he cannot approach without being destroyed. Hence the High Priest was obliged to prepare his entrance into the holiest by first enveloping with the smoke of burning incense the symbol of the sin-covering power of prayer—the cloud which embodied the glory of the Lord.—*Keil.*

Verse 12. Perceiving both priests and people struck with horror and wonder at this darkness, Solomon reminds them that this was no sign of God's dislike or disfavour, as some of them might possibly imagine; but a token of His approbation and grace and special presence among them.—*Pool.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 14—21.

The Joy of an Accomplished Purpose.

The human mind abhors incompleteness. When Charles Leslie died, he left upon his easel an unfinished painting of Titania, from the *Midsummer Night's*

Dream, that was to be another pictorial realization of Shakespearian creations with which the fame of Leslie is inseparably connected. But the busy brain ceased to work, the pencil dropped from the facile fingers, and the deserted fragment retains but a dim promise of the artistic genius which the completed picture would have revealed. It is impossible to gaze upon an incomplete work like that without feeling disappointment and regret. The crumbling ruins of a structure that was once complete is more satisfying to the mind than an unfinished building abandoned to decay without having served any useful purpose. How great, then, is the joy of seeing accomplished a purpose which has cost so much anxiety and thought, and which has been in progress for years! Such a joy was realized by Solomon at this time, when he witnessed the greatest work of his life completed, and that it was accepted of God. Observe—

I. **The joy of an accomplished purpose is expressed in devout thanksgiving** (verses 14, 15). The heart of the king was full of joyous gratitude, and under its influence he blessed the people, and blessed the Lord God of Israel. Sharing in the gladness and solemnity of the occasion, the whole congregation stood up, as if eager to receive the benediction. The first moments of a realized good, long hoped and worked for, are full of unutterable emotion. The ecstacy is sometimes fraught with peril. In his last days the Venerable Bede was engaged in a translation of the New Testament on which he had set his heart. He dictated to one of his disciples the last verse in the Gospel of John. "It is finished, master," said the scribe. "It is finished," replied the dying saint. "Lift up my head, let me sit in my cell, in the place where I have so often prayed. And now, glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." And, with these words, as if the rapture of having accomplished a patiently prosecuted purpose was too much for him, his spirit fled. It is said, on one occasion when Sir Isaac Newton was engaged in some calculations to prove the extent of his elaborated theory of terrestrial gravitation, that, as he drew to the close and foresaw the absolute certainty of the theory they would inevitably prove, he became so agitated that he was obliged to desire a friend to finish them. A genuine joy overflows in thanksgiving.

II. **The joy of an accomplished purpose is intensified by a review of the varied steps by which it is consummated** (verses 15-21). These verses contain an appropriate narration of the most interesting facts connected with the planning and building of the temple, and without such narration the services of the dedication would have been incomplete. 1. *This purpose was divinely suggested.* "The Lord God of Israel spake with His mouth unto David my father" (verse 15). Our best thoughts and holiest inspirations come from God: and the most successful work in connection with His Church is that which is done on the lines projected by His Word. Moses was directed to build the Tabernacle according to the pattern showed him in the Mount (Heb. viii. 5). 2. *Its accomplishment was greatly needed.* For years the ark was migratory, and Jehovah had no settled place for His worship. Under a theocratic government it was important there should be some spot specially set apart in which the Lord could record His name. Jehovah first chose the person who should rule His people, and then put it into his heart to build a house for His worship (verse 17). If any other city than Jerusalem had been divinely chosen for the Temple, then this would be regarded as a usurpation. But it is expressly stated that God "chose no city to build an house" (verse 16); therefore, there was the more urgent need for the building of this. 3. *It was cherished by one who was not permitted to carry it out* (verses 17-19). It was the life-purpose of David to build a temple for Jehovah, and he made extensive preparations accordingly. It would have been an unspeakable joy to him had he been

permitted to build and consecrate the temple; and the occasion would have called into exercise the highest genius of his poetic nature. But this honour was denied him; partly, because the ancient nomadic form of worship was not yet to be abandoned; and because the wars of David unfitted him to be the founder of a seat of peaceful worship (2 Sam. vi. 6, 11; 1 Chron. xxii. 8). But a solemn assurance was given that his dynasty should last for ever to continue the work: and the glory of building and consecrating the most celebrated temple of antiquity fell to the lot of Solomon (2 Sam. vii. 13; 1 Chron. xxii. 9). Jehovah approved and accepted the good intentions of David, though he did not permit him to put them into execution. This Divine approval was implied by God's acceptance of the design, with only the difference that it should be executed by the son instead of the father, and also by the various promises by which He rewarded the pious wish of His servant (2 Sam. vii. 10-16). 4. *It was brought to its final accomplishment by Divine assistance.* "The Lord hath performed His word that He spake" (verse 20), "Hath with His hand fulfilled it" (verse 15). Solomon was the instrument; but Jehovah, as in all truly great enterprises, was the moving power. The son was but completing the plan which had been preconceived and arranged by his father. It is instructive to observe how the unfinished works of a previous age are continued and completed by succeeding generations. M. Lesseps, in constructing the Suez Canal, has only completed the work commenced by Pharoah-Necho; while the Mount Cenis engineers, in tunnelling a way though the Alps, have finished the work of Hannibal. The Pacific Railroad, and the new line of steamers from Hong Kong to San Francisco, have accomplished the grand vision of Columbus of a direct trade between Europe and Asia by the Western, instead of the Eastern route. Russia, by her present efforts to make Sarmacand a great centre of traffic, is filling in the grand outline bequeathed to her by Tamerlane; while, by choosing the Oxus as the great commercial highway of Central Asia, she is merely treading in the footsteps of Alexander the Great. Every age has its own special mission; and it should strive to maintain and extend the civil and religious blessings handed down to it by our suffering and heroic forefathers. The Divine side of the work remains unchangeably the same. God never yet "suffered His faithfulness to fail, nor altered the thing that went out of His mouth" (Ps. lxxxix. 33). Witness the constant and concurrent experience of saints in all ages—not one instance to the contrary.

III. The joy of an accomplished purpose is based on the assurance of its harmony with the Divine covenant (verse 21). The tables of stone laid up in the ark were enduring witnesses of the covenant into which Jehovah had entered with His people. The erection and consecration of the Temple was another evidence of the faithfulness of God to His part of the covenant; and this thought would augment the joy of Solomon on the occasion. There can be no solid satisfaction in doing anything that we know is not in harmony with the Divine will: "Whatever good we do, we must look upon it as the performance of God's promise to us, rather than the performance of our promise to Him. The more we do for God, the more we are indebted to Him; for our sufficiency is of Him, and not of ourselves." We have more need to be concerned about our own fidelity than that of God.

LESSONS:—1. *No purpose can prosper that is not conceived in a humble and grateful spirit.* 2. *It is an unspeakable privilege, and a great responsibility, to be allowed to take any part in the work of God.* 3. *The joy of an accomplished good outweighs the suffering and toil encountered in its achievement.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 16.—The choice of God is no blind preference of one and prejudice against another, but aims at the salvation of both. As from amongst all nations He chose Israel for its salvation, so out of all the tribes of Israel He chose the city of David for the blessing of the whole kingdom.—*Lange.*

Verse 17. How many individuals, as well as whole congregations, have the means and the power wherewith to build a church, to repair a ruinous one, or to enlarge one which has become too small; but nothing can be further from their mind.

Verse 18. Unrealized ideals no useless. 1. The character of an individual life is influenced and shaped by the ideal after which it continually aspires. 2. The ideal of a holy and useful life should be constructed in harmony with the requirements of the Divine will. 3. If the ideal of life is not realized, the effort after its attainment will confer a reflex benefit on the sincere aspirant. 4. Ideals of goodness, though unrealized, call forth the Divine commendation. 5. Unrealized ideals in the present life become the bases of still loftier ideals in the future.

— He who purposes to do a good work, but is hindered therein not by his own fault, but by Divine decree, has yet "well done." God regards his intentions as the deed itself.

— **On maintaining a high ideal.** 1. By a high ideal is meant, not something vast and vague and unattainable, but what each, by God's help, in the full development of his own nature, may attain. To aim at less would be to be sluggish, undutiful, unfaithful. To aim at more would be to enter the mist, and become unreal. Speaking generally, it will be found that whatever can be intelligently and conscientiously aimed at, can be attained. In the very ideas we entertain, and in the endeavours we make, God gives us the assurance that what we thus think of and strive after *may* be attained. It was the notion of Plato that each individual human creature is an offspring or product of an eternal form or idea in the Divine mind. Something of this kind must be supposed in reason: something of this kind is indeed taught by the Christian revelation. God thus, as we may say, keeps the secret of every life, its true image and proportions, and opens that secret to each as he comes to Him. He has a picture in his own mind of which each may be, through His grace, a living reflex. O beautiful, inspiring thought! touching us with fear, and yet raising us to rapture—that each of us can find himself truly, only in his God, and that the discovery is certain to be eternal advancement and salvation. 2. To maintain the ideal high, we must be continually striving to enlarge it. Our moral conception of our own proper nature must either grow larger and more luminous, or fade down into narrowness and darkness. Nothing on earth, mental or material, can continue in one stay. There is a sense in which our best thoughts and noblest purposes are passing away and dying; and our only safety lies in raising still better thoughts and still nobler purposes from the ashes of those that have died. Swift and subtle and sure is the passing away of our most etherial thought, our most glowing emotion. Swift and sure also is the reproduction and expansion of them, so that while there is dying and coming into life perpetually, there shall yet be to our consciousness only an unbroken continuity, and a going on of our life from strength to strength." 3. In seeking to maintain and still enhance this spiritual and great idea of our own life, we shall be much assisted by an assured belief that it is the very thing which God wishes and will help us to realize and be. If God will not help us in this by the breath of His own infinite sympathy, by the uplifting of the light of His countenance upon us, our life is indeed a dark and hopeless thing. It never can expand into summer breadth

and beauty. How it pleases a father, or a strong elder brother, to take the hand of some youthful climber and help him up the rocks and along the giddy and perilous ridge towards some sunny and safe elevations of the mountains! Will it please the Heavenly Father less to help those who, already called and quickened by His grace, are aiming, as they can, after entire conformity to the very image of their Father? 4. If we would maintain a high sentiment and a pure idea about our own life, we must learn to believe in the actual goodness of others as well as in the possible growth of our own. To use technical but perfectly appropriate language, we must learn to believe that God has a people in the world. Look for goodness, and it will shine out upon you, unless you yourself are evil. Look for the love and tenderness of Christ, which yet are found in so many human hearts, and you will soon be refreshed by the breathing of that love and tenderness as though He Himself were near. 5. The contemplation of goodness in others will be found, in the case of most young persons, to operate powerfully in the same direction—towards raising and keeping the standard and tone of life pure and high. Nothing touches life so deeply and sensibly as life. Nothing moves it to finer issues. Is it not certain that, looking, we shall become like? being changed by the subtle, benignant laws of grace into the same image we thus see and admire —"from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." 6. Above all, we must maintain a constant, vital connection —a connection by faith, love, admiration—with Jesus Christ. None among us, old or young, can maintain a high ideal of our life without Him. We need Him—for our reverence and for our admiration, and for our enthusiasm and for our love! and for our frailties, oh! how much! and for our great unworthiness. A human life is simple, pure, and high, when it is a "growing up into Him in all things who is the head."—*A. Raleigh* (condensed from the *Sunday Magazine* for 1873).

Verse 20. The fairest prerogative of him whom God has placed upon a throne is, that he has power to work for the glory of God's name, and to watch over the extension of the Divine Kingdom amongst His people. Every son who succeeds to the inheritance of his father should feel obliged, first of all, to take up the good work whose completion was denied to his father, and perfect it with love and zeal.—*Lange*.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 22—53.

A Model Dedicatory Prayer.

This is a prayer of unusual length, of great compass and pathos in its petitions; and is "remarkable as combining the conception of the Infinity of the Divine Presence with the hope that the Divine Mercies will be drawn down on the nation by the concentration of the national devotions, and even of the devotions of foreign nations towards this fixed locality." It consists of three parts—1. Adoration for the fulfilment of the promise to David (verses 23, 24). 2. Prayer for its continued fulfilment, and for blessings upon the concentration of worship at the Temple (verses 25-30). 3. Supplication for specific blessings (31-53); *e.g.*, in cases of trespass, when smitten before enemies, in times of drought, famine, or plague, for the devout stranger, for success in battle, and for deliverance from captivity. These prayers for specific blessings are seven, thus corresponding in number with the seven petitions of the Lord's prayer. We may regard the whole prayer as illustrative of and embodying the *three principal ideas* which governed the religious life of the Jewish people—the ideas of *God*, of *sin*, and of a *coming deliverance*. Just as the Grecians represented the

philosophic and *artistic* culture, and the Romans the *legislative* capacity, of the human race, so the Israelites represented the *religious* principle—the greatest force of all, and that which was destined to interpenetrate all other forces, and use them for the advancement and salvation of the race. An examination of the scope and matter of this prayer will show how the three leading ideas referred to were ingrained in the national consciousness of Israel. The whole prayer is an excellent model that may be appropriately followed in the dedicatory services of every sanctuary solemnly set apart for Divine worship.

I. This prayer is illustrative of the Israelitish idea of Jehovah. The whole world was overrun with polytheism, and the idea of one God was in danger of being utterly extinguished. Abraham, the founder of the Jewish nation, was rescued, by the special call of heaven, from the darkness and bewilderment of heathenism, and became the great apostle of monotheism. With his descendants was deposited the precious truth, which, though at first a strictly national possession, was ultimately to enrich and exalt mankind. The Israelites cherished the loftiest ideas of Jehovah—1. *As a Being of Incomparable Majesty*: "There is no God like Thee" (verse 23). Jehovah is not compared here with other gods; but, on the contrary, is described as the only true God (compare Deut. iv. 39; Josh. ii. 11; 2 Sam. vii. 22; xxii. 32). God is recognized as the living and personal God, who is the source and power of all things, and in comparison with whom all is emptiness and vanity. 2. *As a Being of Infinite condescension*: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth?" (verse 27). The omnipresence and infinitude of Jehovah are acknowledged. This is at once a refutation of the anthropomorphic notions of God such as heathenism made in its temples, and which it might seek to associate with His dwelling, no longer a movable tent, but in a permanent building; and also a refutation of the pantheistic notion of Deity, which the highest philosophy of heathendom, by identifying God and the world, imagined. "The Israelitish idea of God knows nothing of a contradiction between the supernal, infinite, and absolute being of God, and His entering into creaturely, finite, and limited being. Just because He is infinite and unsearchable, He can communicate with the finite; and because He is everywhere, He can be peculiarly present in one place, centring His presence and displaying His absolute sublimity." 3. *As a Being of unutterable purity*. From Him proceeds the law which discovers sin in us and holiness in Him, and which law is the rule to regulate our earthly life. The whole Levitical economy, in its elaborate particularity, was so constructed as specially to detect and unveil sin in man, and to foster the most exalted conceptions of Divine purity. 4. *As a Being of boundless mercy*: "Who keepest covenant and mercy;" "And when thou hearest, forgive" (verses 23, 30). He is the gracious and merciful God to whom the poor and afflicted may look for help, and all the world for blessing. In the new covenant we no longer call upon God as the God of Israel, but as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has revealed Himself to us through Christ, and through Christ alone do we find in Him the true God, the God of grace and mercy (Eph. i. 3; John xvii. 3). We have glimpses now of the depth and vastness of God's mercy which the most pious Israelite never saw. 5. *As a Being of unchangeable faithfulness* (verses 24, 25). Through the ages of the past, notwithstanding the failures and sins of His chosen people, Jehovah continued steadfast to His part of the covenant. The course of Jewish history is studded with wondrous and convincing evidences of the unswerving fidelity of God; and the sacred writers are never wearied in rehearsing the mighty acts which were done in defence and preservation of His people, and in the accomplishment of His promised Word. The believer of to-day has the same invulnerable fidelity to fall back upon: "Faithful is He who hath promised, who also will do it"

II. This prayer is illustrative of the Israelitish idea of sin. Israel is the nation conscious of sin, conscious as no other nation ever was or could be. The best of men in the pre-Christian age were conscious there was something radically wrong, but they had no just conception of the nature of the wrong, and were utterly powerless to devise a remedy. Convinced that things could not go on as they were, they looked for the destruction of the world, and despaired of mankind. The piety and religions of the ancient world resolved themselves into stoical scepticism on the one hand, and superstitious despair on the other. There was no nation in whom the consciousness of sin was deeper, more genuine, or more powerful than in Israel. The law was a constant remembrancer and a constant convicter of sin. Sacrifice was the central point of all the rites and ceremonies of the law. The sacred fire was to be burning incessantly upon the altar; sacrifices were to be offered day by day; and the climax of all sacrifice was that offered on the great day of atonement, on which the high priest, as the representative of the nation, laid upon the sacrificial animal the sins of the whole people, bore the blood of atonement into the place of God's typical presence, and sprinkled with it the mercy seat, that the people might be absolved from sin, and reconciled to God. Not only is universal sinfulness expressly asserted—"There is no man that sinneth not;" or, rather, *That may not sin* (verse 46)—but the living consciousness of sin is interwoven with every thought. This is the more characteristic, as it was not a penitential ceremony at which the prayer was offered, but a joyful thanksgiving festival, and it was offered by a king who was the wisest of his time, and had reached the summit of power and prosperity. It is evident then, how deeply rooted was this consciousness of sin in Israel, and how inseparably it was blent with their religious ideas. (Consult *Luthardt's Fundamental Truths*, Lecture viii., and *Lange's Com.*) The deeper our sense of sin, the more awful does the holiness of God appear, and the more eagerly do we welcome and prize His mercy.

III. This prayer is illustrative of the Israelitish idea of future deliverance and glory. Israel was the nation of hope. Ancient prophecies of a Redeeme and of a glorious redemption, in which the whole world was to share (verse 60) existed among this people, and ever kept their view directed to the future These prophecies assumed a form ever increasingly definite, while their fulfilment was confided to an ever narrowing circle—to the seed of Abraham, the tribe of Judah, the house of David. And now Israel, in the reigns of David and Solomon, has reached the climax of its history and the maturity of its national development and glory; and this era is a type of the victorious conflicts and universal peace of the future, when a greater than Solomon shall reign over a vanquished and ransomed world. It is remarkable that while Solomon is offering this prayer, at the very flood-tide of national prosperity and triumph, as if gifted by prophetic insight, he foresees the defeat and captivities of Israel in the future, and earnestly supplicates for their restoration, that the Divine purpose in advancing the good of mankind and His own glory might not be frustated (verse 46-53—compare with verse 43-59, 60). "The common talk of vulgar rationalism, about Jehovah being only a God of the Jews and of their land, appears in all its emptiness and folly when contrasted with the official acknowledgment of Israel's world-wide mission, and which acknowledgment was made on a most solemn occasion." The continual approach of a great deliverance and of an era of happy, peaceful, and glorious government, is the great theme of all the Hebrew prophets. Diversely as the records may read, penned as they were under such different circumstances, all the varying features of the prophetic utterances combine to form one great, bright picture of future blessings. The history of Israel to the present is a witness to the veracity of the prophecies and to the wondrous facts of Christianity. The prince who, on one occasion, asked his chaplain to furnish him with the evidence of the truth of Christianity,

but to do so briefly, for he had no time to spare, received as an answer the words—"The Jews, your majesty!"

LESSONS:—1. *Prayer is a humble admission of personal dependence and helplessness.* 2. *Must be offered to the only living and true God.* 3. *Should be comprehensive in its topics.* 4. *Should be urgent and persevering in supplication.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 22. Solomon stands before the altar, bows the knee, stretches out his hands; the people stand around, the worshippers turn their faces towards the sanctuary (verses 38, 44, 48, 54). In prayer the ancients used to spread out the palms of their hands, as it were to receive a blessing from God (Exodus ix. 29; Psalms xliv. 20; cxliii. 6). Outward forms for the worship and service of God are not to be rejected when they are the natural unbidden outflow of inward feeling. They are worthless when they are regarded as meritorious, and man puts his trust in them (Luke xviii. 11). They are sinful and blameworthy if they are performed merely for appearance's sake, or to deceive men (Matt. vi. 5, 16). The Lord knows the hearts of all men; one cannot serve the living God with dead works. The Lord Himself and His Apostles prayed upon their knees (Luke xxii. 41; Eph. iii. 14). No one is so exalted that he ought not to bow his knee and clasp his hand.

Verses 23-53. The prayer of Solomon. 1. A witness to his faith. He confesses the living, holy, and one God before all the people. 2. To his love. He bears his people upon his heart, and makes intercession for them. 3. To his hope. He hopes that all nations will come to a knowledge of the true God. From Solomon we may learn how we ought to pray—in true reverence and humiliation before God, with earnestness and zeal, with undoubting confidence that we shall be heard. What an elevating spectacle—a king upon his knees praying aloud in the presence of his whole people, and in their behalf! Although the highest of them all, he is not ashamed to declare himself a servant of God, and to fall down upon his knees; although the wisest of them all, he prays, as a testimony that a wisdom which can no longer pray is folly; although the mightiest of all, he confesses that nothing is done by his power alone, but that the Lord is the King Eternal; therefore it is that he does not merely rule over his subjects, but as an upright king supplicates and prays for them likewise.—*Lange.*

Verse 27. Reflecting upon God's performance of His promise concerning the building of the Temple, Solomon breaks forth into admiration. Is it possible that the great and high and lofty God should stoop so low as to take up His dwelling here amongst men! O, astonishing condescension! The heaven—all this vast space of the visible world:—And heaven of heavens—the third and highest and therefore the largest heaven, called the heaven of heavens here (as also Deut. x. 14; Psalm cxlviii. 4), for its eminency and comprehensiveness—cannot contain Thee, for Thy essence reacheth far beyond them, being omnipresent. How much less this house that I have builded! This house, therefore, was not built as if it were proportionable to Thy greatness, or could contain Thee, but only that therein we might serve and glorify Thee.—*Pool.*

By the sentence that the heaven of heavens—*i.e.*, the heaven in its most extended compass; the illimitable space above the visible heaven or firmament which lies immediately over the earth—cannot contain God, Solomon strikes down all rationalistic assertions, that the Israelites imagined Jehovah to be only a finite national

god. The infinite and supra-mundane exaltation of God cannot be more clearly and strongly expressed than it is in these words. That, however, Solomon was addicted to no abstract idealism is sufficiently apparent from this, that he unites this consciousness of the infinite exaltation of God with the firm belief of His real presence in the temple. The true God is not merely infinitely exalted above the world, has not only His throne in heaven (verses 34, 36, 39; Psalm ii. 4; xi. 4; ciii. 19; Isaiah lxvi. 1; Amos ix. 6), He is also present on the earth (Deut. iv. 39), has chosen the temple for the dwelling place of His name in Israel, from which He hears the prayers of His people.—*Keil.*

— Although the heaven of heavens cannot contain the Unmeasurable and Infinite One, and no building, how great and noble soever, can suffice for Him, yet, in His mercy, He will make His dwelling place (Jno. xiv. 23) in the heart of that man who loves Him and keeps His word, and it will truly become a temple of God (1 Cor. iii 16). He will dwell with those who are of a humble spirit (Isaiah lvii. 15; Psalm cxiii. 5, 6).

Verses 27-30. **The greatness and condescension of God.** I. *God is too great to be confined by anything that has limits.* 1. He is greater than all created things: "Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee" (verse 27). Solomon wonders that God should appoint a temple to be erected to Him upon the earth, when He is not contained in the vast circuit of the heavens; His essence is not straitened in the limits of any created work. He who was before the world, and place, and all things, was to Himself a world, a place, and everything: He is really out of the world in Himself, as He was in Himself before the creation of the world. As because God was before the foundation of the world we conclude His eternity, so because He is without the bounds of the world we conclude His immensity. He is above and outside of all His creatures, and governs all the possibilities of their existence 2. He is present everywhere. Everything is filled by God; but that which is filled is different from that by which it is filled. The Omnipresent God is the inmost fundamental Being of everything that exists: He is the life of all that lives, the Spirit of all spirits. And as He is all in all, so is all in Him. As the bird in the air, as the fish in the sea, so do all creatures live and move and have their being in God. The world of time and space, of nature and history, is contained in Him. But although creation is contained in God, God is not contained in His creation. Although the Omnipresent One is essentially present in every leaf and every grain of wheat, He dwells and moves freely in Himself, in virtue of His eternity. The fundamental error of Pantheism is the notion that God is Omnipresent of necessity. God is present in one way in nature, in another way in history; in one way in the church, in another way in the world: He is not, in the same sense, present alike in the hearts of His saints, and in those of the ungodly; in heaven and in hell (*Martensen*). II. *God condescends to make His church His dwelling place.* 1. Here His presence is especially realized: "The place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there" (verse 29). The choice of Jerusalem as the place seems to have been made by special revelation to David (Ps. lxxviii. 68; cxxxii. 13, comp. with 1 Chron. xxii. 1). The Name Jehovah is synonymous with the nature and perfections of Jehovah; and it is here intimated that He would be present in His temple to show forth His power and glory by enlightening, quickening, pardoning, sanctifying, and saving the devout and sincere worshipper. As the prayerful Jew directed his gaze towards the Temple of Jerusalem, so the believer must address his prayers to God through Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the spiritual church (Dan. vii. 10, with Heb. x. 19, 20; Col. i. 18). 2. Here His word is deposited. The church is commissioned to hold inviolate the sacred trust, and

to disseminate the Word in all its purity and power. The hoarded riches of ancient cities were paltry compared with the inexhaustible wealth of revelations which are treasured up in the church of God—treasured up not to lie unused and unproductive, but to enrich the world. 3. Here His mercy is dispensed. The ark of the covenant, with its mercy seat, was in the Temple—a symbol of hope and a pledge of deliverance to the transgressor. III. *God is graciously pleased to hear and answer the prayer of the humble suppliant* (verses 28, 30). 1. **Prayer may be offered anywhere.** The exclusiveness of the Jewish religion was a preparation for, and made possible, a religion that was to be adapted to universal man. In the old dispensation prayer was offered in or towards Jerusalem (verse 30): in the present dispensation the command is that "Men pray *everywhere*, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. ii. 8). Both tabernacle and temple were types of Christ—God manifest in the flesh; and He was and is the Mediator between God and man. The human nature of Christ is the temple in which dwell all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; therefore all prayer, to be acceptable and entitled to a hearing, must be offered to God through Him. There is no restriction as to locality. From the crowded sanctuary or the quiet home-circle, from the dingy prison or the pathless seas, the worshipper may direct his prayers to the Great Helper of the helpless. 2. Prayer, to be successful, must be fervent. Solomon speaks of the "cry" and the "supplication" (verses 28, 30). The more vividly the soul realizes its need and its peril, the more pathetic and passionate will be its cry for help. Spite of the hollow sneer of modern scientists, prayer has an indefinable something about it that moves the heart of God, and brings Him consciously nearer to the praying soul. The most coveted prizes in religious experience have been won by wrestling prayer.

LESSONS:—1. *The greatness of God is manifested in His merciful condescension.* 2. *He is worthy of ceaseless adoration.* 3. *The most abject sinner who turns to Him will not be rejected.*

Verse 29. The eye of God looks upon every house where His name is honoured, where all with one mind raise heart and hand to Him, and call upon His name (Psa. cxxi. 4). To every church the saying is applicable—My Name shall be there. The object of every church is to be a dwelling-place of divine revelation, *i.e.*, of the revealed Word of God, in which, upon the strength of that Word, worship, praise, and prayer shall be offered to the name of the Lord.

Verse 30. The houses of God, above all else, must be houses of prayer (Isa. lvi. 7): they are desecrated if devoted to merely worldly purposes of any kind whatsoever, instead of being used for prayer and supplication. The hearing of prayer does not, indeed, depend upon the place where it is offered (Jno. iv. 20), but prayer should have an appointed place, where we can present ourselves, even as God wills that, together with one voice, we humbly exalt His name (Rom. xv. 6; Psa. xxxiv. 4). Where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is in their midst; how much more will He be where a whole congregation is assembled to call upon Him.—*Lange.*

Verses 31-50. The seven petitions of the prayer teach us—1. In all necessity of body and soul to turn to the Lord, who alone can help, and call upon Him with earnestness and zeal (Psalm l. 15; xci. 14, 15). 2. In all our straits to recognize the wholesome discipline of an holy and just God, who will show us the good way in which we must walk (Psalm xciv. 12; Heb. xii. 5). 3. To confess our sins, and to implore forgiveness in order that we may be heard (Psalm xxxii. 1, 5, 7). 4. Not only for ourselves, but also for others, in their time of need, should we pray and supplicate, even as the king does here for all individual men, and for his entire people.—*Lange.*

Verses 31, 32. The solemn appeal of the accused. 1. *That cases will arise where it is difficult to convict the wrong-doer of his crime.* Sin is subtle in its movements and deceptive in its appearance. It often wears the garb of the saint, while it is enacting the enormities of the most vicious. How often is the truth concealed by the most miserable equivocation. A sudden lie may be sometimes only manslaughter upon truth; but, by a carefully constructed equivocation, truth always is, with malice aforethought, deliberately murdered. It is difficult to detect the real culprit, amid the mystifications he has himself originated, as it is to seize the cuttle-fish by groping in the inky waters it has itself discoloured. 2. *That the final refuge of baffled justice is to allow the accused an appeal to the judgment of God.* 1. This appeal has been often abused. In the ruder stages of human development, very painful methods were resorted to as tests of innocence. Fire and sword were freely used for this purpose. In the dark ages a fire was kindled within the church, not far from the great altar; a bar of iron was heated, and, after an elaborate ritual of prayers and abjurations, the accused was required to carry the red-hot iron nine yards from the flame. The moment he laid it down, he was borne by the priests into the vestry: there his hands were wrapped in linen cloths, sealed down with the signet of the church; and, according to the condition in which the hands were found on the third day, was he declared innocent or guilty. A belief was common among the northern nations that the corpse of a murdered person would bleed on the touch or at the approach of the real murderer; and this test was often applied with great and imposing ceremonies. In Borneo, we are told, when two dyaks have to decide which is in the right, they have two equal lumps of salt given them to drop into water, and he whose lump dissolves first is deemed to be in the wrong. Or, they put two live shell-fish on a plate—one for each litigant—and squeezing lime-juice over them, the verdict is given according to which man's mollusc stirs first. The Siamese, again, have a curious way of deciding the truth between two parties in the absence of witnesses: their method is to ascertain which of the two can stay longest under water. Such are specimens of the varied plans which reveal the craft, the audacity, and the folly of mankind. 2. This appeal must be solemn and sincere (verse 31). Though the method may be abused, we may and must call upon God to help the innocent man to his rights, and, even in this world, to reward the evil man according to his deserts. It is allowable for a pious man to entreat God to administer his just cause; yet, must he not wish evil to his neighbour in mere human vindictiveness (Psa. cix. 1). The oath is a prayer, a solemn invocation of God in testimony of the truth: the false oath is not merely a lie, but an insolent mockery of God, and God will not be mocked (Gal. vi. 7; Ex. xx. 7). Bear in mind, when thou swearest, that thou art standing before the altar, *i.e.*, before the judgment-seat of the Holy and Just God, who can condemn body and soul to hell. Where the oath is no longer held sacred, there the nation and the state go to ruin.—*(Starke).* 3. *That the Judgment of God is infallible in the punishment of the guilty and the vindication of the innocent* (verse 32). The sinner cannot triumph for ever; and the cries of the injured for justice are not in vain. The retribution of the wicked is often swift, and is always terrible: God "brings his way upon his head." This He hath done on those who have taken false oaths of execration, as may be instanced in the three false accusers of Narcissus, the bishop of Jerusalem; in the case of Earl Godwin; and in the case of one Anne Averies, who, forswearing herself in a shop in Wood Street, London, in 1575, praying God she might sink where she stood, if she had not paid for the wares she took, fell down speechless and instantly expired. Verily, there is a God that ruleth in the

earth, and every act of man shall receive its due recompense according to its character.

Lessons:—1. *The innocent need not fear the strictest scrutiny.* 2. *Sin is certain to be discovered and punished.* 3. *The appeal to Divine Justice is not in vain.*

— Personal injuries. I. *Should not be lightly inferred.* Here an oath was taken of the man who had inflicted the injury. This oath was to be taken before God's altar.

II. *Should be committed into the hand of God.* The Judge of all the earth will do right. Prayer to God when we smart under injury will—

1. Prevent a vindictive spirit. 2. Lead us to desire the triumph of righteousness.

Verse 33, 34. The terrible scourge of war. 1. That the defence of a nation depends upon the bravery of its people. 2. That sin saps the foundation of natural courage. 3. That war is sometimes an instrument of punishment for national offences. 4. That war is ever attended with terrible suffering. 5. That defeat often drives a nation to seek help and deliverance in prayer. 6. That God hears the cry of the humble and penitent captives, and brings them out of their distresses.

— I. *The commission of sin producing national calamities.* Israel smitten before the enemy, "because they sinned." This result may be brought about by the operation of natural laws—not necessary to suppose any miraculous intervention. Sin weakens —sin destroys.

II. *The means that should be employed in times of calamity.*

1. Reformation—"Turn again to thee." 2. Confession of sin—"Confess thy name." 3. Prayer to God—"And pray."

— A victorious enemy is the whip and scourge with which the Lord chastises a nation, so that it may awake out of sleep, confess its sins, turn unto Him, and learn anew its forgotten prayers and supplications. To those who are taken captive in war, and, far from fatherland, must dwell beneath a foreign yoke, applies the Word of the Lord (Luke xiii. 2). Therefore, they who are prospering in their native country must pray for them, believing in the words of Psalm cxlvi. 7.

Verses 35, 36. The abuse of prosperity and its Nemesis. I. Prosperity is a blessing from God. He controls the food-producing elements —opens or stops "the bottles of the sky," fills the earth with fruitfulness, or binds it up with the iron bands of sterility. II. Prosperity is encompassed with many perils. Of a reckless and thankless indulgence—of a proud self-sufficiency—of an impious forgetfulness of God. III. The abuse of prosperity is followed with inevitable punishment. Hard, harassing, and unremunerative labour—general scarcity—life-long disease, personal and social sufferings. IV. The teachings of adversity tend to correct the errors of prosperity. The proud and thoughtless are humbled—man is taught his absolute dependence on God—a spirit of genuine devotion is encouraged—a wise and generous use of prosperity is inculcated.

—Introduces a question about which there has been much angry discussion Can human prayer modify or influence the operation of natural law? If so, to what extent, and under what conditions? Probably a thorough and satisfactory solution of the problem will never be obtained. No *necessary* conflict between prayer and natural law.

I. *The possibility of a great calamity arising from natural causes.* "Heaven shut up." "No rain."

II *The connection of this calamity with human sinfulness.* "Because they have sinned against Thee."

III. *The Scriptural method of terminating this calamity.*

1. Confession of sin. 2. Abandonment of sin. 3. Prayer of God.

— Inasmuch as fruitful seasons, instead of leading to repentance, as being proofs of God's goodness, so often tend to create pride, haughtiness, and lightmindedness, therefore the Lord sometimes shuts up His heavens. But then we should murmur not against Him, but against our own sins (Sam. iii. 39), and confess that all human care and toil for obtaining food out of the earth is in vain if He give not rain out of heaven and fruitful seasons. Fine weather is not brought about by the means of processions, but by true repentance and heartfelt prayer (Lev. xxvi. 3, 4). When God humbles us, He thus directs to the good way (Psalm cxix. 67; Deut. ii. 3; v. 8).—*Starke.*

Verse 36. **The good way.** 1. Is Divinely revealed. 2. Is maintained by Divine instruction. 3. Is lost by disobedience. 4. Is found in the pathway of suffering and trial. 5. Leads to everlasting blessedness.

Verse 37-40. **National calamities and their lessons.** I. *That national calamities are varied in their character* (verse 37). 1. Famine, a scarcity, or total want of bread, necessarily springing from the preceding cause, want of rain. 2. Pestilence, any general and contagious disease. 3. Blasting, anything by which the crops are injured, so that the ear is never matured, but, instead of wholesome grain, there is a black offensive dust. 4. Mildew, anything that vitiates or corrodes the texture of the stalk, destroys the flowers and blossoms, or causes the young shaped fruits to fall off their stems. 5. Locust, a well-known curse in the East, a species of grasshopper that multiplies by millions, and covers the face of the earth for many miles square, destroying every green thing, leaving neither herb nor grass upon the earth, nor leaf nor bark upon the trees. 6. Caterpillars, the locust in its young or *nympha* state. The former refers to ocusts brought by winds from other countries, and settling on the land; the latter, to the young locusts bred in the land. 7. An enemy, having attacked their defenced cities, the keys and barriers of the land. 8. Any other kind of plague, that which affects the surface of the body —blotch, blain, leprosy, ophthalmia, &c. 9. Sickness, whatever impaired the strength, or affected the intestines, disturbing or destroying their natural functions. II. *That national calamities are aggravated by individual offences.* 1. Sin is the fruitful source of all calamities, and is itself the greatest of all. 2. That a personal consciousness of sin is the discovery of man's greatest moral plague (verse 38). III. *That national calamities should lead to national humiliation and prayer.* IV. *That the removal of national calamities should intensify and augment national piety* (verse 40).

— Divine judgments and means of discipline are very various in their kind, their degree, and their duration. God in His wisdom and justice metes out to a whole people, as to each individual man, such measure of suffering as is needed for its salvation, for He knows the hearts of all the children of men, and He tries no man beyond His power of endurance. He hearkens to him who calls upon Him in distress (2 Sam. xxii. 7; Psalm xxxiv. 18; Isaiah xxvi. 16). Distress teaches us how to pray, but often only so long as it is present with us. God looks upon our hearts, and knows whether our prayer is a mere passing emotion, or whether we have truly turned to Him. How entirely different would our prayers often sound if we reflected that we were addressing Him who knows our heart, with its most secret and mysterious thoughts, expectations, and wishes. The effect of an answer to our prayers must be that we fear the Lord, and walk in His ways, not only in the time of need and trouble, but at all times as long as we live. It is a priceless thing that the heart remains constant.—*Lange.*

Verse 38. **The moral plague of humanity.** "Shall know every man the plague of his own heart." I. The moral plague of humanity is sin. II.

s inward and individual. III. Is terrible when it intensifies itself into the form of a conscious and deserved judgment of God. IV. Is an unspeakable blessing when it induces man to escape from its ruinous consequences by a timely repentance. V. Can be removed only by a believing application of the Divine Remedy.

— "The plague of his own heart." His own iniquity (Psalm xviii. 23): the cause of his calamity, as he well understandeth when sin and wrath meet in his soul and make a wound in it: the cure whereof he seeketh of God by prayer, which hath a pacifying property, and fetcheth out the stain and sting of sin.—*Trapp.*

Verse 39. **The divine knowledge of man.** 1. Is infallible. 2. Universal. 3. Minute. 4. Is specially concerned with his moral condition. 5. Enables God to reveal man's true state to himself. 6. Should foster in man a spirit of vigilance, circumspection, and awe.

Verse 40. **The fear of God is again connected with forgiveness in Psalm cxxx. 4, as if he should not fear, unless we could hope.** So Milton makes Satan say, "Then farewell Hope; and with Hope, farewell Fear." And Aristotle speaks of fear as inseparably connected with hope (Rhet. ii. 5).—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verses 41-43. **The unifying power of prayer.** I. All men are alike in their moral needs. II. The exercise of prayer is an invisible but all-active power that unites the entire race—irrespective of rank, of nationality, of creed, or outward circumstances. III. Prayer is a divinely-appointed means of bringing all men to a true knowledge of God. IV. Prayer recognises the fact of a universal brotherhood.

Verse 41. Nothing is more remarkable in the Mosaic law than its liberality with regard to strangers. Not only were the Israelites forbidden to vex or oppress a stranger (Ex. xxii. 21), not only were they required to relieve the stranger who was poor or in distress (Lev. xxv. 35), not only had they a general command to "love the stranger" (Deut. x. 19); but, even in religious matters, where anciently almost all nations were exclusive, they were exclusive, they were bound to admit strangers to nearly equal privileges. Such persons might make offerings at the tabernacle under exactly the same conditions as the native Israelites (Num. xv. 14-16); and they might be present at the solemn reading of the law, which took place once in seven years (Deut. xxxi. 12). It is quite in the spirit of these enactments that Solomon, having first prayed God on behalf of his fellow-countrymen, should next go on to intercede for the strangers, and to ask for their prayers the same acceptance which he had previously begged for the prayers of faithful Israelites.—*Speaker's Com.*

Verses 41-43. Even Solomon bore witness that the house he had built could not encompass Him whom the heavens cannot contain, so likewise he testified that the covenant made by God with Israel did not exclude all other nations from salvation, but rather aimed at leading all men to a knowledge of the truth. If a Solomon prayed for the attainment of this object, how much more does it become us to pray for the conversion of the heathen, and do our utmost that the people who sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, may come to Him, a light set by God before all nations to lighten the heathen (Luke ii. 31). He who desires to know nothing of missions to the heathen, fails to know the God who wills that help should be given to all men, and that all should come to the knowledge of Himself (1 Tim. ii. 4). Solomon hoped that the heathen, when they heard the great deeds which the Lord did in Israel, would turn to that God; how much stronger becomes this hope when the infinitely greater scheme of salvation in Christ Jesus is declared to them!—The acknowledgment of the name of God necessarily causes the fear of God. If an individual, or an

entire nation, be wanting in the latter, they will, alas! lack a true knowledge of God, let them boast as they will of enlightenment and enlightened religious ideas.—*Lange.*

Verse 43. Here is one of the Old Testament intimations of the universality of the true religion and true worship of God. Though the national consciousness of Israel was that of separateness from all other nations, yet at times the Spirit lifted it above that exclusiveness, and thrilled it with a momentary grasping after universal brotherhood.—*Terry.*

Verse 44. This refers to wars undertaken by Divine appointment—"Whithersoever thou shalt send them": for in no other wars could they expect the blessing and concurrence of the Lord; in none other could the God of truth and justice maintain their cause. There were such wars under the Mosaic dispensation; there are none such under the Christian dispensation: nor can there be any, for the Son of Man is come, not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Except mere defensive war, all others are diabolic; and if there were no provocations, would there be any attacks, and, consequently, any need of defensive wars?—*A. Clarke.*

Verses 44, 45. **Prayer a preparation for conflict.** 1. Every man is called to wage unceasing warfare against evil. 2. Man can conquer evil only by Divine aid. 3. He who prays the most will fight the best. 4. Prayer will win the conflict when all external tactics fail. 5. God will prosper and maintain the cause He has made His own.

— A people who undertake war should, above all, be sure that it is under the guidance of God. That alone is a just war which is undertaken with God's help and in the cause of God, of truth, and of justice. A host going forth to battle should remember this:—Nothing can be done in our own strength; we are soon quite ruined (Psa. xxxiii. 16), and thereupon we should pray and entreat the Lord, from whom alone proceeds victory (Prov. xxi. 31; Ps. cxlvii. 10).—That soldier can never answer it to God that strikes not more as a justicer than as an enemy. Soldiers must fight and pray, and pray and fight.

Verses 46-50. **Captivity and freedom.** I. Captivity is a bitter experience to the ardent lover of liberty. It is the badge of defeat—the loss of home and country—exposes to exasperating taunts and pitiless cruelties. II. Captivity to sin, and on account of sin, is most degrading, and fraught with unutterable distress. III. The first step towards freedom begins in repentance and prayer (verse 47). IV. Freedom from sin involves restoration to the Divine favour and inheritance.

— Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people (Prov. xiv. 34). Thus the people Israel is a living example for all times as a warning and as an admonition (1 Cor. x. 2.) The Lord has patience with each person as also with whole peoples and governments, for He knows "there is no man that is not sinful." But when the riches of His goodness, patience, and long-suffering are despised, and a nation given over to hardness of heart and impenitence (Rom. ii. 4), He casts it away from before His face, and wipes it out as a man wipeth a dish (2 Kings xxi. 13), so that it ceases to be a people and a kingdom. The world's history is the world's final doom. The wrath of God towards all ungodly conduct of men is not a mere biblical form of speech, but a fearful truth, which he who hearkens not will learn by experience.—The saying: "There is no man that sinneth not"—that may not sin—must not be misused to apologize for sin as a natural weakness; it should rather warn and exhort us that we must not give the reins to that will which lieth even at the door, but rule over it (Gen. i. 4, 7); for he who committeth sin is the slave of sin (Jno. viii. 34). The statement is not made with reference to the possibilities of gracious attainment in the Christian life, but

to the ordinary facts of human history. The meaning is, there is no man and no nation that can claim to be beyond the possibility of sinning. Israel must not assume that because they are the chosen people that may not, by running into sin, draw down the Divine anger in bitter judgments upon them. But here is surely no such universal proposition as to involve, as some assume, that even the New Testament saint, whose life is hid with Christ in God, sees never in this life the hour in which he does not sin. The confession, "We have sinned" (verse 47) must come from the depths of the heart, and must be in connection with the conversion of the whole soul to the Lord; for he alone can obtain forgiveness of all his sins in whose spirit there is no guile (Ps. xxxii. 2). But how often in days of fasting and humiliation is this confession made only with the lips! How, then, can a man hope for mercy and forgiveness through the hearing of prayer? The Lord, who guides the hearts of men as water-courses, can bestow upon our enemies a forgiving and merciful heart, even as Israel experienced. For this, and not for the destruction of our enemies, we ought to pray.—*Lange* and *Whedon*.

Verse 50. Solomon probably means, not merely such compassion as Evil-Merodach showed towards Jehoiachin in alleviating his sufferings and ameliorating his condition (2 Kings xxv. 27-30; Jer. lii. 31-34), but such as Cyrus and Artaxerxes showed in allowing the captive Jews to return to their own land (Ezra i. 3; viii. 13; Neh. ii. 6, compared with Ps. cxlvi. 46).

Verse 51. "The midst of the furnace of iron." The disciplinary aspect of affliction. I. Is very painful to endure. II. Tests the faith and patience of the sufferer. III. Purifies and ennobles the whole man. IV. Magnifies the grace and power of God in sustaining and delivering. V. Prepares for a loftier mission and more extended usefulness.

Verses 51-53. Arguments in pleading with God. Based on—I. Intimacy of relationship: "They be thy people." 1. Specially chosen: "For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth." 2. Specially prized: "Thine inheritance." II. The fact of great suffering: "The midst of the furnace of iron." III. The memory of past deliverances: "Which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt." IV. The record of Divine pledges and promises: "As thou spakest by the hand of Moses."

— In the midst of our cries and prayers we should remember how dearly the Lord has purchased us for His own by the blood of His Son (Rom. viii. 32; 1 Cor. vi. 20; Rev. v. 9). The grace of God in Christ is the foundation of our assurance that the Lord will deliver us from all tribulation and sorrow, and will lead us to His heavenly kingdom. For this do we close our prayer with the words—For the sake of thine eternal love. God does not leave His people in the furnace of misery, but always guides them forth from it (Job. iii. 22). Our prayers from beginning to end must be grounded on the Divine promises (2 Sam. vii. 25).—*Starke*.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 54-61.

The Elevating and Satisfying Power of True Devotion.

I. It fills the soul with grateful emotion (verses 54, 55). As Solomon rose from his knees, after his earnest and prolonged pleading with God, his heart was so full of Divine and heavenly influence that it overflowed in earnest and emphatic expressions of gratitude and joy—"He stood and blessed all the congregation with a loud voice." And so it is. They that wait upon the

Lord shall renew their strength—shall gain an increase of moral vigour and sympathy. The suppliant may enter the presence-chamber of the Invisible and Eternal God with trembling and fear; but he retires braced up in courage, and clothed with supernatural power, prepared for conflict and hopeful of victory: he comes, stricken down with a gloomy sense of personal unworthiness and defilement, and retires modestly elated with a sense of pardon, transfigured with the radiance of a moral transformation, the very countenance glistening with the chrism of a heavenly benediction. There is no emotion so tender, so profound, so full of nameless pathos and tranquillising joy like that which flows into the heart in its quiet moments of communion with God; or which, like sunshine after storm, visits the soul after it has passed through a season of earnest and successful wrestling with God. The man whose life is spent in devotion, though bound to earth by the dearest human ties, holds high fellowship with the world above. In him earth and heaven are united—both are understood by him in their true significance, and held in proper balance and esteem. He is like a tall, gigantic mountain whose broad base is fixed in the rocks far down beneath our feet, but whose top, springing into the lofty expanse above, reposes under the pure covering of radiant snow and sunlight He is lifted above the pleasures of this world, and finds consolation and strength in the darkest day of adversity. The apostle was "in prison more frequent," but in his dungeon he found the presence of Jesus, and could pray and sing praises unto God. "I thought of Jesus," said the holy John Rutherford, when imprisoned for the Gospel's sake, "until every stone in the walls of my cell shone like a ruby."

II. It presents the most exalted and satisfying views of the faithfulness of God (verse 56). 1. *As to a specific Divine promise.* "The Lord hath given rest unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised." Solomon blessed God, not for wealth, grandeur, power, or victory, all of which had been so conspicuously bestowed on Israel, but for *rest*. Without this blessing all the others would be unavailing. Many weary years wheeled round, and many sharp trials were endured before the promised rest was given; but it came at last. And it will come to us. Oh! how often does the veteran wilderness-traveller, wearied with toil, and battered with conflict, turn his dim, weather-worn eyes towards the shadowy outlines of the Canaan he approaches, and sigh for the rest that remains for the people of God! 2. *As to every Divine promise.* "There hath not failed one word of all His good promise" (Deut. xii. 10; Josh. xxi. 45; xxiii. 14). How marked is the contrast between man, the promise-breaker, and God, the promise-keeper! Every Divine promise is based on His unchangeable faithfulness, and backed by His Omnipotence. Not only the nature of God, but every act of His providential and redemptive government, is a guarantee of His incorruptible and unfailing fidelity. Whatever is opposed to the Divine will must inevitably fall: whatever God has promised will be inevitably fulfilled. The united and fiercest opposition of earth and hell cannot hinder the final and complete accomplishment of the Divine Word.

III. It realizes the nearness of God in the ordinary walk of life (verses 57, 58). 1. *The nearness of God with His people is a fact of past experience.* "As He was with our fathers." He was with Abraham when he was called by His mysterious voice to leave the idolatrous associations of his early life, and migrate to an unknown country and become the father of a countless heritage. He was with Jacob when he fled from the fury of an incensed brother. He appeared to him at Bethel, assured the distracted traveller of future guidance and prosperity, and renewed to him the promise which had been made to Abraham. He was with Israel in Egypt, preserved them amid

the threatenings and cruelties of their relentless taskmasters, delivered them from their oppressors, defended them amid the perils and trials of the wilderness, and guided them in safety to the promised rest. God is with His church to-day; and in this fact is the assurance of her final victory and everlasting blessedness. 2. *The nearness of God is matter of personal consciousness.* "That He may incline our hearts unto Him." The heart is the sphere in which God manifests His presence—mind revealing itself to mind, will to will, heart to heart. When the soul is full of love to God, it the more readily recognizes His presence in every event of life. "If we have loving, waiting, Christ-desiring spirits, everything in this world—the common meal, the events of every day, the most veritable trifles of our earthly relationships—will all have hooks and barbs, as it were, which will draw after them thoughts of Him. There is nothing so small but that to it there may be attached some filament which will bring after it the whole majesty and grace of Christ and His love." Man is never so sweetly conscious of the nearness of God as when he is bowed at His footstool in humble and sincere devotion. He only forsakes those who have forsaken Him (Ps. ix. 11). 3. *The nearness of God is the great inspiration to a life of obedience.* "To walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments." The temptations to turn aside from rectitude are many and powerful, but for Divine aid we should be powerless to resist. When, says one, the believer is as nigh to God as a creature can be, the sound of the devil's feet is heard behind him; but, blessed be God! He is near to His people as the devil can be, and if the devil touch Job's flesh and Job's bone too, God is in Job's heart, and that is nigher. The end of Divine blessing is to bring the heart near to Him, and to give grace to walk in His way with uprightness and perseverance.

IV. It teaches how temporal blessings are to be subordinated and made contributory to the more glorious end of spreading the knowledge of the only true God (verses 59, 60). Jehovah blessed Israel with a marvellous history, with deliverances, successes, and affluence which reached their climax of grandeur and power in the age of Solomon, but He did it all for His name's sake; and to fit the nation for its great mission in making known His salvation to all people (verse 60). Every temporal blessing has its moral significance, and increases the responsibility of the recipient. Wealth, intellectual genius, spiritual influence, that is not used for God will only intensify the sorrows and sufferings of the unfaithful possessor. Like most garments, like most carpets, everything has a right side and a wrong side. You can take any joy, and by turning it round find troubles on the other side; or you may take the greatest trouble, and by turning it round find joys on the other side. The gloomiest mountain never casts a shadow on both sides at once, nor does the greatest of life's calamities. By aiming at the glory of God in all things, sorrows will be turned into joy, reverses into success.

V. It stimulates the soul after a higher standard of moral perfection (verse 61). The best and greatest wish which a king can form for his people, a father for his children, a pastor for his flock, is—May your heart be righteous—*i.e.*, whole and undivided before the Lord our God. He who elects to side with Him must do so wholly and entirely: all "halting between two opinions" is an abomination to him: the lukewarm he will spue out of his mouth. Be thou on the Lord's side, and he will be with thee (*Lange*). The great end of prayer is to encourage a holier life; and it is a mighty agency in promoting that end. We must find happiness in our every-day life and in the performance of our ordinary duties, or we shall miss it altogether. The greatest happiness is the outgrowth of the highest moral perfection, and the spring of both is found in a spirit of profound devotion.

LESSONS:—1. *The soul touches the lowest depth of humiliation and reaches its most exalted blessedness in communion with God.* 2. *The brightest visions of God's character and the most practical lessons for the conduct of life are obtained in the best moods of devotion.* 3. *Prayer is one of the most potent agencies in promoting a holier life.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 54-61. Solomon's final address to the people contains—1. A psalm of praise (verse 56). 2. A wish for a blessing (verses 57-60). 3. A warning (verse 61).

Verse 56. "The Lord hath given rest unto His people." Compared with 1 Chronicles xxiii. 25. **The rest of the people of God.** I. In the mysterious polity of the people of Israel, spiritual and temporal blessings were so closely allied that the same language might naturally be employed to signify either. When with the conviction of special divine superintendence was combined the pure and lofty moral nature of the Divine Governor, as revealed in the law issued by Moses, it is inconceivable but that the higher class of Israelitish minds, the holy and meditative class, must often have felt that the mass of ordinances which surrounded them were truly meant as types of some more profound spiritual realities; and that their whole national history was intended to image forth a moral history, wider in its purpose and extent, and more adequate to the power and dignity of a God whom they well knew to be the God of the whole earth as well as of the territory of Israel, yea, even a God whom "the heaven of heavens could not contain." In the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews it is shown that the *rest* which the Israelites enjoyed in the land of promise, no less than the rest of the Sabbath-day, was symbolical of the repose of the persevering Christian. II. It is not unwarrantable to conjecture that when the patriot cried—"The Lord hath given rest unto His people Israel," he was not more the patriot of Israel than of mankind; or at least, that the Spirit of God spoke through his lips with a higher purpose, to be explained and developed by the events of subsequent ages. The God of Israel, in permitting His ark to be deposited in a permanent abode, seemed to guarantee the eternal glory of the city of David. And it seemed at length that the Lord was about to give His people the proof of His peculiar favour, which they might naturally have expected, by actually exalting them to the highest temporal position among the nations of the earth, and making the divine glory on the mercy seat the centre from which the deputed authority of God was to radiate to the circumference of the world. It was the destiny of Israel, after a brief period of prosperity, to separate into rival dynasties, to run through a course of much iniquity, to despise constant, reiterated warnings, and at length to merge into utter ruin, undestroyed, indeed, but preserved only as a monument of God's abiding vengeance. But mark the unsearchable depths of the purposes of Providence! These national misfortunes brought in universal blessedness. Israel fell to prepare the salvation of mankind; and the *rest* which the Lord denied His people was denied only that an everlasting rest might be secured to His spiritual people for ever! III. This rest which the Lord God of Israel bestows on His spiritual Israel is no unattainable blessing even on this side of the grave. It is the mark of a poor spirit to be satisfied with small things. With the temporal dispensations of God, whatever they be, a Christian is bound to be content; but for the man who is not a Christian, that discontent should be *his* portion is the prayer of mercy itself! Such discontent is the voice of the Spirit of God, for whom his nature was origin-

ally formed, calling upon him to perceive and acknowledge that he has no abiding city here, and that in seeking after the things that belong to his peace, he must turn to the Prince of Peace. What some dreamer imagined as to the structure of the earth we live on, is a truth as regards our own internal nature. We are, indeed, a fragment struck from the great source of light and heat, from the sun of eternal righteousness; and if the force that wilfully separates us from our origin would but cease to operate, we should return to our native birth-place, even the bosom of our Father; we should fly to the centre of all good, and there abide in blessedness for ever. To effect this union is the great object of our religion: Christ the Mediator is the link that binds us to the centre of everlasting happiness. IV. 1. Rest and peace must fall upon a Christian spirit, first from its devotion to Christ Himself, and its devoted imitation of His pure and perfect example. The life of a Christian is the imitation of Christ. And, among all the imitable attributes of Christ, none is more beautiful than His perfect *peace*. Blessed Lord! Thou dost indeed give us this peace when Thou givest Thyself as our example! To be thy disciples and copyists is to be at peace with everything but sin. 2. This influence of the character of Christ becoming the great examplar of their actions is not the only cause which works peace and rest in the hearts of his followers. The very singleness of the object of His hope has a power to elevate the Christian above the petty concerns of daily life. The true peace of mind is that which resolves all into a single principle. God is one: let our affections but partake of the unity of that object, and we shall have reached the pathway of real and imperishable rest. 3. The same question might be argued from the very nature of the Christian affections, affections whose very exercise is peace and happiness. In the very exercise of faith and hope and love, there are the materials of peace, even apart from the subject of these feelings. The mere position of a mind believing, trusting, and loving is one of real happiness and rest. 4. In such a state as ours, unless the eternal world in some manner becomes the guarantee of this, we are the slaves of every accident, without any hope for the future, any consolation for misfortune, any substantial or permanent motive for conduct, any reward for endurance, any guide for life. The earthly and the heavenly elements must combine, or we are powerless. To have the great object of our thoughts placed beyond the chances of human life is to place ourselves beyond them! Our hope "entereth into that within the veil." The Christian lays hold of a chain which is bound to the throne of God; he links himself to the eternal certainties of nature; the immutable attributes of the God of the universe are pledged for his security. As the certainty of the end is greater than that of the means, and as the dead world that surrounds us exists, doubtless, with a main view to the Christian people of God—the less perfect being ever subordinate to the more perfect—so we may say that the finest laws of nature and man, the very foundations of the world that now is, are *less* firm and durable than the purpose of God to make His faithful people happy! (Condensed from *Archer Butler*.)

"There hath not failed one word of all His good promise." **The Divine purpose fulfilled.** 1. God hath formed a purpose of mercy toward mankind. 2. The fulfilment of this purpose of mercy is committed to the Lord Jesus—accomplished by His own atonement for sin, and by the communication of the Holy Spirit. 3. The Divine purpose of mercy, under the administration of the Lord Jesus, shall be perfectly and triumphantly accomplished.

Verse 57. **The presence of God.** 1. Necessary. 2. Promised. 3. Actually experienced. 4. Continued on obedience. 5. The source of all help and happiness.

Verse 58. All keeping of the com-

mandments, all mere morality, without submission of the heart to God, is worthless; a mére shell without the kernel.

Verses 59, 60. The words which rise out of the depths of the heart to God reach Him and abide with Him. He forgets them not (Rev. viii. 3,4). That the Lord is God, and none other, seems nowhere more conspicuous than in the choosing and leading of the people Israel, in which He has revealed Himself in His might and glory, in His holiness and justice, His faithfulness and mercy (Psalm cxlv. 3-12). No better proof of the existence of a one living God than the history of Israel.—*Lange.*

Verse 61 (compared with Exod. xv. 11). Holiness the supreme end of life. 1. We need the revelation of God's holiness in order to sustain us in the presence of the tremendous forces of the external universe, and in the presence of what sometimes seems to be the chaotic confusion of this world's affairs. To me it is not the benevolence of God which seems to be supremely necessary for the solace and the peace of the heart, but His justice. I want to know that the law of righteousness, to which my conscience does homage, will sooner or later be openly and completely vindicated; that even now we are not under the government of mere chance or of brute force, but of a living holiness; that there is not only a judgment seat before which, in some remote and uncertain day, all men will have to give an account of the deeds done in the body, but that now a righteous God rules the world, and suffers no irreparable injustice to be inflicted on any man; that however intolerable the actual condition of human affairs may seem to me, He who has power to prevent every accident, every mistake, every folly, every crime; He who could strike the liar dumb before he utters the slander which will break the heart of the innocent; He who could unmask before it is consummated the villainy which will ruin the peace and honour of a fair and virtuous home. He who could strike down with mortal disease the reckless statesman who hurries a nation into an unnecessary and iniquitous war; I want to know that He the Almighty and Omniscient Ruler of all men is not careless of what happens on earth, that He has no selfish purpose to accomplish, that He is not wilful, that He is not capricious, but absolutely and perfectly just; that He has a hatred and scorn as much more intense than mine for every sin as His nature is greater than my own. Knowing this—and I know it—I can look back upon the sorrowful ages of human history, I can look round upon the wild confusions of my own time, I can look forward to the dark and stormy future which, apart from Him, promises no sure relief from the vast and terrible evils which seem to be the inheritance of our race, and my heart is at rest. From the vision of God's holiness I receive a peace which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take away. 2. Nor is it only peace of heart which God's holiness inspires. The Divine holiness is a strong support to all our endeavours to attain moral and spiritual perfection. Whatever mystery may rest upon the Divine government, and however unable we may be to interpret the issues that are to come out of the movements of that providence over which God presides, we can be in no doubt concerning God's ultimate purpose in relation to ourselves. Apart from any spiritual relation, we have an absolute certainty that wherever there is the capacity for holiness, holiness must be the great end of existence. We are capable of a perfection which transcends, though it includes moral virtue, and this perfection is holiness. Since we are capable of it, it is, and it must be, the supreme end for which we ought to live. We miss the glory which is within our reach if we do not attain to it. God's holiness makes it certain that He regards our holiness as the very crown of our nature, apart from which the idea which He desires to have illustrated in every man is unfulfilled. 3. God has no ultimate use for a man who is not holy, and such a

man does not become what he was meant to be. Being holy Himself, it must be, and it is, His great concern that we should attain to moral and spiritual perfection. God's supreme concern in relation to you and me is, not that we should be happy to-day or to-morrow, and all our life through: His supreme concern is that we should regard sin with intense and unutterable abhorrence, and that we should regard goodness with a deep and passionate affection. And God will not shrink from inflicting any pain, however sharp, or any suffering, however protracted, upon any of us, that may be necessary in order to fulfil His great design. IV. This was His supreme purpose in sending the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. Christ came to save us from our sins, not merely to release us from the penalty of our sins, much less to assure us that we may remain sinful and yet not miss the glory and the blessedness for which God made us. The grace that Christ reveals does not for a moment suggest that God regards our sin with that pity and compassion with which it is the tendency of our modern religious lives to regard all sin; but that He abhors sin so much, that He Himself stooped to the most terrible sufferings, to shame and to death, in order to deliver us from sin. The holiness of God lies at the very root of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is just because God is so holy that He set His heart upon redeeming us from the power of sin. Until we know that God is glorious in holiness, as well as infinite in mercy, and find in His very holiness that on which we shall build our trust, and that out of which our joy shall spring, we know very little of the fulness of life, and the depth of peace, and the perfection of blessedness possible to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.—(Condensed from *R. W. Dale* in C. W. P.).

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 62—66.

Sacrifice the Test of Gratitude.

The Temple, the dwelling-place of Jehovah, the pride of the Jews, the marvel of the ages, was now completed; and its solemn dedication was attended with overwhelming manifestations of the divine presence and glory. Its actual consecration is now crowned with an act of sacrifice on a scale of unexampled magnitude and grandeur. Monarch and people cheerfully unite in offering the vast holocaust. As the whole empire shared in the religious benefits of the occasion, so it was fitting it should share in its religious duties. Observe—

I. That a grateful heart prompts to acts of sacrifice. Bowed under a sense of the Divine condescension and beneficence, the people burst forth in praising Jehovah, "For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever" (2 Chron. vii. 3). It is when the heart is touched and melted with gratitude that it is most prolific in generous sacrifices, in holy resolves, and in initiating noble enterprises. The origin of many a stately building, of many a princely charitable endowment, and of many a sacrifice which, though small as the widow's two mites, has, like hers, been the most acceptable to heaven, may be traced to the tender impulse of a holy and grateful heart. While Jacob was impressed with the goodness of a manifested God, he vowed a vow and set up a pillar (Gen. xxviii. 16-22). When Isaiah felt the cleansing touch of the Seraphim, and saw the ineffable glory of Jehovah, the difficulties of his mission vanished, and his grateful and enraptured spirit eagerly cried, "Here am I; send me!" (Isa. vi. 1-8.) In a similar way, many a brave and successful missionary pioneer has offered his all upon the altar. The heart that is incapable of gratitude is incapable of anything truly great.

II. That sacrifice should be proportioned to the magnitude and character of the benefits conferred (verse 62-64). 1. *It should be equal to the occasion.*

The opening of the temple was the greatest event in the history of the Israelitish nation. It was the fulfilment of a promise of many years' standing; the crowning act of a graduated series of laborious preparations. The liberality with which the people offered their gifts, the enthusiasm with which they laboured in its erection, and the readiness with which they gathered to celebrate its dedication, indicate the supreme importance in which it stood in the national estimation. And now the sacrifices they are called to offer must bear some adequate proportion to the greatness of the occasion. Alas! how few gifts to the church of God, now-a-days, are worthy of the name of *sacrifice*? Men—Christian men so-called—will spend hundreds of pounds in a pleasure trip, a fancy ball, a luxurious banquet, or a bit of jewellery, and yet insult the church of Christ by grudgingly offering a paltry piece of silver! There is neither poetical nor any other kind of justice in conduct like this. It is shockingly below the occasion. All sense of honour, of obligation, of gratitude, is utterly quenched. 2. *It should be proportioned to ability.* God had bestowed on Solomon great commercial prosperity, great wealth, great intellectual powers, great religious privileges, and he strives on this occasion to offer a becoming return to the Great Giver of all good. The Lord estimates the sacrifices of the rich, not by what is given, but by what is left. It was a frequent saying of Gonsalvo de Cordova, the great Spanish captain, "Never stint your hand: there is no mode of enjoying one's property like giving it away." It is expected by every law of right and justice that the wealthy should offer to God's cause in accordance with their means; that the intellectually gifted should devote their best powers to promote His glory; and that those who are specially endowed with spiritual influence should use it diligently for the good of humanity. God does not expect impossibilities. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. viii. 12).

III. That sacrifice is a privilege to be enjoyed (verse 65). It was here accompanied with great festivities. The feast of the dedication of the altar lasted for a week, over which period, probably, the offering of the enormous mass of sacrificial victims was extended. This, again, was succeeded by the Feast of the Tabernacles (2 Chron. vii. 8, 9), now celebrated with more than the usual festivities. The mere feasting occasioned by the vast number of victims was sufficient to mark the grandeur of the festival. Whatever we do for God should be done cheerfully and willingly, with all the relish of an enjoyable feast: not as if performing some irksome and unpleasant task, but as if enjoying a distinguished privilege. It is a triumph of Divine grace in man, and an evidence of a high state of personal sanctity, when it becomes a joy to make sacrifices. It is then that man most closely imitates the example of the great Sacrificial Victim who said, "Lo I come to do thy will, O God!" and who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.

IV. That sacrifice is often followed by the most joyous results (verse 66). The vast host of Israelites who had joined in the celebration was filled with joy and thankfulness. When the people were dismissed they blessed the king, and went away to their tents, glad and merry of heart, lightening the journey home with songs of joy, "for all the goodness that the Lord had done for David His servant, and for Israel His people." Great sacrifices are often succeeded by great blessings. What we sow in tears, we reap in joy. The sacrifices of a few may contribute to the happiness of the many. The one sacrifice of the Son of God has filled earth and heaven with gladness.

LESSONS:—1. *We owe to God more than we can ever repay.* 2. *The most acceptable sacrifice to God is a grateful and obedient life.* 3. *We find our greatest happiness in our greatest sacrifices*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 62-66. The Temple Dedication. 1. A thanksgiving feast (verses 62, 63). 2. A covenant feast (verse 65). 3. A feast of great gladness.

— For great benefits men should offer great thanksgivings, and indeed should prove their gratitude by promoting the true service of God, and by benevolence to the poor and needy. —*Lange.*

Verse 62. A sublime spectacle. 1. A nation before the Lord consecrating a temple to His worship. 2. King and people mutually acknowledging sin. 3. King and people uniting in highest acts of devotion. 4. King and people rejoicing together.

Verse 63. Sacrifices. 1. Were offered ever since the fall. 2. Were a perpetual memorial of Jehovah's covenant with His people. 3. An acknowledgment of Divine mercies. 4. Necessary as an expiation for human sin.

Verse 64. The *Burnt Offering* was so called because the victim was wholly consumed by fire upon the altar, and so, as it were, sent up to God on the wings of fire. This idea, which is expressed in the account of Noah's sacrifice, and which constantly recurs both in the Scriptures and in profane authors, is implied in the Hebrew word, which signifies *to ascend.* The sacrifice was a memorial of God's covenant, and signified that the offerer belonged wholly to God, and that he dedicated himself soul and body to Him, and placed his life at His disposal. And every such sacrifice was a type of the perfect offering made by Christ, on behalf of the human race, of His human nature and will to the will of the Father. The *Meat Offering* always accompanied the burnt offering, for which it might be substituted by the poor. As the burnt offering signified the consecration of *life* to God, both that of the offerer himself and of his living property, so in the meat offering the produce of the land was presented before Jehovah, as being His gift. The *Peace Offering* was not an atoning sacrifice to make peace with God, but a joyful celebration of *peace made* through the covenant. In this part of the Mosaic ritual, more than in any other, we see Jehovah present in His house, inviting the worshipper to feast with Him. Peace offerings were presented either as a *thanksgiving,* or in fulfilment of a *vow,* or as a *free-will offering* of love and joy.

Verse 66. When a man has rendered unto God what is of God, he can go forth to his daily labour with joy and gladness. To praise and thank God makes the heart glad and willing to work. A good king is the joy of his subjects. When we return to our eternal home, our joy shall never end; and our King Jesus will be the theme of everlasting praise.

— As the King concluded, the cloud which had rested over the Holy of Holies grew brighter and more dazzling; fire broke out and consumed all the sacrifices (2 Chron. vii. 1); the priests stood without, awestruck by the insupportable splendour; the whole people fell on their faces, and worshipped and praised the Lord, "for He is good, for His mercy is for ever." Which was the greater, the external magnificence or the moral sublimity of this scene? Was it the Temple, situated on its commanding eminence, with all its courts, the dazzling splendour of its materials, the innumerable multitudes, the priests in their gorgeous attire, the king, with all the insignia of royalty on his throne of burnished brass, the music, the radiant cloud filling the Temple, the sudden fire flashing upon the altar, the whole nation upon their knees? Was it not rather the religious grandeur of the hymns and of the prayer; the exalted and rational views of the Divine Nature; the union of a whole people in the adoration of one Great, Incomprehensible, Almighty, Everlasting Creator?—*Dean Milman.*

— "For all the goodness that the

Lord had done for David his servant." The heritage of the good. 1. Is transmitted to succeeding generations. 2. Bears constant testimony to the Divine faithfulness (comp. verse 15). 3. Demands continued obedience on the part of its possessor. 4. Is an unspeakable boon to any nation. 5. Should be earnestly coveted and faithfully preserved.

CHAPTER IX.

SEVERAL IMPERIAL TRANSACTIONS.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Chapter divides itself into two sections: verses 1-9, God's answer, of promise and warning, to Solomon's prayer; verses 10-27, transactions between Solomon and Hiram, with a record of Solomon's levy of labourers, his officers and servants, his navy and foreign trade. Verse 1. It came to pass, &c.—*i. e.*, "at the end of twenty years" (verse 10), for verse 1 begins a narrative which verse 2 interrupts; verses 2-9 being a parenthesis. Solomon's desire, חֵשֶׁק—(1 Chron. vii. 11), "All that came into Solomon's heart." Thenius suggests "pleasure buildings" as in distinction from public works. But verse 19 explains his "desire" as having reference to "Jerusalem, Lebanon, and all the land of his dominion"—probably aqueducts, &c. Verse 2. That the Lord appeared, &c.—Rather, "*for* the Lord appeared," as interposing this section, which continues till verse 10 resumes the narrative. The second time as, &c.—In Gibeon, during the night after his sacrifices (chap iii. 5); in this instance, during the night following the dedication prayer and sacrificial offerings; and again "in a dream." Verse 3. *Sept.* inserts, after "Supplication that thou hast made before me," "*I have done to thee according to all thy prayer.*" Verse 6. If ye shall at all turn.—A. V. implies only the slightest dereliction, "at all turns" whereas שׁוֹב תָּשֻׁבוּן is an intensive Hebraism, implying entirety, absolute apostasy. Which I have set before you: or, *Moses* set before you; so *Sept.* Notice also that the threatening (verse 7) is a quotation from Moses (Deut. xxviii. 37). Verse 8. This house is high—Omit italicised words *at* and *which*; *is* high = future tense, *shall be* high עֶלְיוֹן, not exalted in renown (as Von Meyer, De Wette, Bähr), but shall stand high, a *conspicuous example*, a pre-eminent illustration of destruction. Others (the Peshito and Dr. Böttcher), "this house *shall be a heap*." Sept. = ὁ οἶκος οὗτος ἔσται ὁ ὑψηλός. Vulg., *et domus hæc erit in exemplum*. Verse 10. At the end of twenty years—Seven and a-half years spent in erecting temple, twelve and a-half upon his own house. This verse takes up again the suspended narrative (verse 1, *supra*). After Solomon, with the aid of Hiram, had completed his work, the king *gave Hiram twenty cities*, &c. Verse 11. Cities in the land of Galilee—Adjacent to Tyre (Josephus), until then unconquered, and occupied by the Canaanites. Verses 12 and 13. They pleased him not. . . he called them Cabul—Gesenius regards Cabul as a name of contempt; Keil considers the word to be a contraction from כְּהֹבְגִל *as a vacuity*, a desolate region. Verses 15-19. Solomon fortified the border cities especially open to attacks from foes, and carried out building projects for the public health and advantage. The levy which King Solomon raised—Comp. notes on chap. v. 13. Verse 23 shows whom the *levy* included. Verse 22. Men of war עַבְדִים = officials of the war department. Rulers of his chariots שָׁלִישִׁים—Rather, royal adjutants—the royal body guard. Verses 24 and 25 are inserted here without apparent connection with the narrative, but by referring back to the events which embarrassed Solomon at the beginning of his reign (chap. iii. 1-4), they mark the completion of his building projects, and hence the fulfilment of "all his *desire*." Verse 26. Navy of ships—The Sept., Chald., and Arab. have the singular *ship*, both here and verse 27; yet אֳנִי means a fleet. *Ezion-geber*, a port at the eastern head of the Red Sea. *Elioth*, Elim, where a grove of terebinth trees still stands at the head of the gulf. Verse 28. Gold, four hundred and twenty talents—2 Chron. viii. 18 states 450, a mere change of the cipher נ (50) into כ (20): calculated to value £2,804,000.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1, 2.

The Privilege and Responsibility of Divine Manifestation to Man.

At two important eras in the career of Solomon, Jehovah appeared to him The first appearance was at Gibeon, at the outset of his kingly career, when th Lord gave him not only what he asked for, but also riches, dignity, and fame. the second occurred some years after, when Solomon had completed all his grea works, and stood at the highest pinnacle of his external and imperial grandeur Each appearance had its own peculiar significance and worth. The one afforded the opportunity and power to advance on a pathway of unexampled greatness and authority; the other was fraught with warning as to the danger of apostasy and decline, and that at a time when he had reached the very summit of success. Favoured, indeed, is the man whose life is divinely guided in its beginning, prospered in its progress, and cautioned and guarded in its mid-career. To fall, after being thus divinely fenced, is a saddening proof of the fickleness of human promises, of base ingratitude, of gross criminality. Every revelation of God to man is a distinguished privilege and a grave responsibility.

I. That Divine manifestation to man is an act of gracious condescension. In all ages man has eagerly longed for revelations of the Divine. Heathen authors speak of the appearance of gods on the earth, and of the exaltation of heroic men to the dignity of deity; the former in the incarnations of the Eastern world, the latter in the apotheoses of the Western. Though these are but poetic fancies, they indicate the strong aspirations of the human heart after God. Sin has broken the union that once existed between God and man, and created a moral gulf which man is wholly unable to cross But the infinite mercy of God has followed man in all his wanderings, met him more than half way, and bridged the otherwise impassable chasm. The yearnings of humanity have been satisfied by Divine manifestations. The revelations of Jehovah in Israel were preliminary and prophetic of the great revelation in which He was Himself to appear in the person of His Son, and thus restore the harmony between God and man that had been disturbed by sin. Sin was the reason for the incarnation: the needs of humanity were met by the gracious condescension of God.

II. That Divine manifestation to man often occurs at a critical juncture in his individual history. Solomon was now at the height of his fame —in the full tide of prosperity. Temptations unlike any he had had before assailed him, and he was, perhaps, less prepared to resist them. There was no one around him who had the courage or the ability to warn him of his dangers. At this crisis, Jehovah appeared to him a second time, and, while encouraging him in the pathway of integrity, cautioned him as to the consequences of disobedience. How deep and untiring is the interest God takes in His children. His manifestations are the most timely, and His words fraught with profound significance. The extremity of the individual life has been the opportunity for Divine interference; the crisis has been successfully passed, and the destiny changed. The Divine manifestations are unmistakable. A poor Arabian of the Desert was one day asked how he came to be assured that there was a God. "In the same way," said he, "that I am able to tell by the print impressed on the sand whether it was a man or a beast that had passed this way." The manifestation of the God-Man was at a critical period in the world's history; and who shall estimate the influence of that manifestation on the destinies of the human race!

III. That Divine manifestation to man involves a solemn responsibility. 1. *Because it is made to one who can apprehend and appreciate its significance.* It is not a display to insensate and unthinking matter. However gorgeous might be the revelation in its external aspect, there is nothing in star, or flower, or tree to catch and respond to its meaning; they robe themselves in the glory, while all unconscious of the truth it unfolds. But the revelation to man is to one gifted with intelligence and formed in the Divine image. "If we think of God, we think of Him after our image; and we do not think incorrectly. And as God has ever thought of and willed Himself, so has He ever lovingly willed man, in order to impart Himself to him." Thus having affinity with the Divine nature, man is competent to understand the meaning and appreciate the value of Divine manifestations. 2. *Because it is made to one who is capable of carrying out the Divine behests.* Man has capacity for accomplishing great things. Vast, indeed, is his power for good or for evil. Marvellous are the productions of human genius. Solomon had just exemplified what one man could do, when divinely aided, in building up an empire which was the wonder of succeeding ages. Man is exalted to the highest dignity when he becomes a medium for carrying out Divine ideas and purposes. 3. *Because it is made to one who may abuse the blessings it confers.* The will of man is free, and that which may be the instrument of the greatest good may become a power for propagating terrible mischief. The noble may become ignoble, the refined base, the honoured contemptible. Few great men exercise the questionable caution of a certain celebrated musical composer who spent the last forty years of his life in almost complete idleness, saying, "An additional success would add nothing to my fame; a failure would injure it. I have no need of the one, and I do not choose to expose myself to the other." Mayhap, it would have been well for some lives if they had terminated when, to all appearance, they had reached the highest point of moral goodness, rather than be prolonged to present such pitiful examples of degeneracy and sin.

LESSONS:—1. *God honours man by His manifestations.* 2. *The most blessed manifestation is that which is made to the heart.* 3. *Every manifestation of God is a prelude and motive to loftier enterprise and toil.* 4. *To disregard Divine manifestation is to incur unutterable calamity.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1-2. The second appearance of Jehovah to Solomon.—1. The point of time at which it occurred: after the completion of the great works of the kingdom. 2. The object of the appearance: promise and warning.

— The appearance with which Solomon was favoured after the completion of his many grand edifices, as the text clearly and positively says, is expressly placed in relation to and contrasted with that which he had in the beginning of his reign at Gibeon (ch. iii. 5). He had succeeded in all that he had undertaken. Not only did he himself stand at the summit of fortune, but his people had never before reached such a great and prosperous state, being blessed with peace and quiet without, and with prosperity and comfort within. Then came the second appearance, which contained, with the remembrance of the prayer answered at the dedication of the Temple and the promise of blessing in the future, a threatening and warning very wholesome, and even necessary now, for Solomon himself, who, though hitherto loyal and faithful to the Lord, was open to the temptation to fall away, as the after-history shows. It was also needed by that ever-restless, fickle people which, in the enjoyment of the greatest happiness, were in dan-

ger of forgetting their Lord and God, and of relapsing into the idolatrous worship which was more agreeable to the flesh.—*Lange.*

— This was a great engagement upon Solomon to cleave close to that God who had appeared unto him twice (ch. xi. 9). See an analogical appearance to all that love Him (Jno. xiv. 21); and be instructed, lest God's soul depart from us (Jer. vi. 8), for our evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God (Heb. iii. 12).—*Trapp.*

— **The danger of transitions in life.**—1. Every period in life has its special dangers. 2. The greatest danger is present when in a state of transition from one period into another. 3. In every such transition special help and wisdom should be sought. 4. It is an unspeakable boon to be conscious at such times of the Divine presence and guidance. 5. To ignore the lessons of such periods is to invite disaster and ruin.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 3-9.

Religion the Glory of a Nation.

I. That the religion of a nation does not consist in anything external. 1. *Not in the grandeur of its temples.* Architecture and artistic decoration are not essential to true piety. The most exquisite creations of the trowel and mallet can never rival the glorious edifice which has been already reared by the master hand of Deity. Nature is one vast cathedral, with its roof fretted with clouds and gemmed with stars; its aisles are the long-extended valleys; its pillars the lofty, massive hills; its altar the spot where the worshipper reverently bends his knee; and its music the manifold voices that rise from bird, or forest, or sea. Some of the costliest temples built by the art and adorned by the genius of man are consecrated to the worship of other than the only true God. 2. *Not in the elaborateness of its ritual.* The rites and ceremonies of the Israelitish religion in the days of Solomon were minute and exacting. Their worship was a rich, imposing pageant, calculated to impress both the worshipper and the spectator; and their history shows with what scrupulosity they observed the forms of their ritual when the spirit which gave those forms life and meaning was altogether quenched. It is the tendency of man to rest in the outward; and the devoutest worshipper has often to complain—

> But I of means have made my boast,
> Of means an idol made;
> The spirit in the letter lost,
> The substance in the shade.

3. *Religion consists in the sincere worship of an ever-present God.* The true glory of Moriah's Temple was the hallowing presence of Jehovah. "I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (verse 3). When we fail to recognize the true God, when we forget His eye is upon us, when we are no longer conscious of His personal and all-compassionate love, religion ceases to be a power, ceases to be a reality. We may take our place in the temple, we may engage mechanically in its services, but there is no longer any true, acceptable worship (Matt. xv. 8, 9).

II. That the religion of a nation depends for its permanence on obedience to God (verses 4, 5). 1. *Obedience is regulated by clearly defined injunctions.* "To do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments." Obedience must be intelligent, be governed by a studious

appreciation of the Divine commands. We are surrounded by law. We cannot properly fulfil the great purpose of life without some acquaintance with the laws and forces in operation around us. The mariner needs it in order to pilot his vessel aright, the scientist to guide him in research, the physician to ameliorate human suffering. There should not be less study given to the laws of God for the government of our moral actions than is given to the laws of nature. 2. *Obedience must be genuine and complete.* "In integrity of heart and in uprightness." We must be sincere. When we remember with what energy and publicity we have sometimes served sin, we should be animated with the more courage and earnestness in serving God. "He doeth not God's will but his own, who doeth no more than himself will. Everything must be done as well as anything, else we do nothing." 3. *Obedience is illustrated by noble examples.* "If thou wilt walk before me as David thy father walked." God expects no impossibility. What one man has done, another may do. David had great imperfections; but he had also great virtues. The seed of the godly cannot expect to enjoy the entail of the blessing unless they tread in the steps of those who have gone before, and keep up the piety of their ancestors. Solomon's subsequent fall lends to these repeated warnings a special interest. 4. *Obedience ensures perpetuity of blessing.* "Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever" (verse 5). Obedience and blessing run together. If we are faithful to our part of the covenant, God will never fail on His part. All the promises of God are conditional; and failure in fulfilment of the promise is no proof of changeableness in God, but of infidelity in man. While the condition is observed, the promise is inviolably kept.

III. That the decay of the religion of a nation is inevitably followed by national ruin (verses 6-9). 1. *The ruin of its national greatness.* "Then will I cut off Israel out of the land I have given them." In the very land where the Jews were most highly exalted did they witness the most abject degradation When the people forsook God, and turned to idols, the Temple of Solomon—the world-wide evidence of national prosperity and blessing—was destroyed, Israel ceased to be an independent kingdom, and the people were banished; and when, after the second temple was built, they rejected David's greater Son—their promised, true, and eternal king in whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed—this temple was destroyed never to be rebuilt, and the people were scattered through the whole world, ceasing for ever to be an independent kingdom and nation. Irreligion will ruin a nation more completely than an invading army could do. The external evidences of national greatness are the last to go: the first fatal weakness begins within, and may progress for a time silently and unnoticed. 2. *The ruin of its religious prestige.* "And this house which I have hallowed for my name will I cast out of my sight." The temple was the symbol and external evidence of the intense religiousness of the people. Never was there before a nation so favoured with religious privileges: it was its solemn mission to preserve and promulgate the idea of the Only True God, which idea had become lost amid the mists of heathenism. When Israel lost its religion it lost everything—temple, character, influence. The same is true of every nation that abandons God. 3. *The ruin is held up as a terrible warning to all ages.* "And Israel shall be a proverb and a bye-word among all people; and this house which is high (Heb. *shall be high*), every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss" (verses 7, 8). Not a scornful hiss, but a hissing of terror (Jer. xix. 8; xlix. 17). The temple and the nation shall be as conspicuous in their desolation as in their glory. No people in the world ever became such a proverb—everywhere despised, reviled, and persecuted. By its story it illustrates to all nations the unchanging truth uttered by the prophet Azariah to King Asa, "If ye forsake Him, He will forsake you" (2 Chron. xv. 2).

LESSONS:—1. *Religion is at once the strength and the adornment of a people.* 2. *The chief concern of the monarch should be for the religious welfare of his people.* 3. *The nation that abandons God will be abandoned by Him.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 3. "To put my name there for ever." God's gifts are without repentance. When He puts His name in the temple, He does it, in intention, for ever. He will not arbitrarily withdraw it after so many years or so many centuries. Once placed there, it will remain there for ever, so far as God is concerned. But the people may, by unfaithfulness, drive it away.

— "Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." Solomon's prayer had been that God's eyes might be directed towards the temple continually. The answer given is—Not mine eyes only, but mine eyes *and mine heart*. To every house where the name of God is truly honoured applies the Divine saying, "Mine eyes and my heart shall dwell there for ever."

— The Divine solicitude for the Church. 1. He investigates its moral condition. 2. He sympathises with its struggles. 3. He rejoices in its triumphs. 4. His care is unremitting.

Verse 4. "If *Thou* wilt walk before me" (compared with verse 6). The power of individualism. 1. The national is vastly influenced by the personal. 2. A monarch may foster or blast the religious interests of his people. 3. The greater the authority placed in the hands of one man, the greater is his responsibility for its use or abuse. 4. How momentous are the opportunities presented within the compass of a single life!

Verses 6-9. Because men endure uninterrupted prosperity with much greater difficulty than they do crosses and afflictions, therefore, when they are at the summit of their wishes and their hearts' desire, it is most necessary that the grave importance of God and of eternity should be held up before them, so that they may not fall into security, and forget to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Matt. xvi. 26; 1 Cor. x. 12). The more abundantly God displays His mercy and love towards an individual or towards a nation, so much the more fearful will be the righteous sentence, if the riches of His mercy are despised. In happy and prosperous days forget not that the Lord tells us, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." How many men, how many families, how many nations, blessed in every respect, have come to a fearful and shameful end! Askest thou—Wherefore is this? The only reply is—Because they have forsaken the Lord their God; for what a man sows that shall he also reap. Let him who will not recognize a Divine justice, turn to the twice-destroyed temple of Jerusalem, and to the world-scattered people who have become a byeword amongst all nations.—*Lange*.

Verse 7. If our growth in grace does not correspond with our privileges, our boast of the temple and the best form of worship will but delude and destroy us.

Verse 9. Apostasy is hateful even among the heathen. Solyman, the Grand Signior, rejected the revolt of his Christian subjects to Turkism, and doubled their taxations.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 10—14.

QUESTIONABLE GENEROSITY.

I. It is questionable generosity when a gift is tardily rendered. "And it came to pass at the end of twenty years—that then King Solomon gave

Hiram twenty cities"—one city for every year of building. The charm of generosity is its promptness. That is well done that is done quickly. To give slowly is to give grudgingly. The Arabians are said to be remarkably lavish in their generosity. Gibbon relates that a dispute had arisen who, among the citizens of Mecca, was entitled to the prize of generosity, and a successive application was made to the three who were deemed most worthy of the trial. Abdallah, the son of Abbas, had undertaken a distant journey, and his foot was in the stirrup when he heard the voice of a suppliant, "O son of the uncle of the Apostle of God, I am a traveller, and in distress!" He instantly dismounted to present the pilgrim with his camel, her rich caparison, and a purse of four thousand pieces of gold, excepting only the sword, either for its intrinsic value, or as the gift of an honoured kinsman. The servant of Kais informed the second suppliant that his master was asleep; but he immediately added, "Here is a purse of seven thousand pieces of gold—it is all we have in the house—and here is an order that will entitle you to a camel and a slave." The master, as soon as he awoke, praised and enfranchised his faithful steward, with a gentle reproof that by respecting his slumbers he had stinted his bounty. The third of these heroes, the blind Arabah, at the hour of prayer, was supporting his steps on the shoulders of two slaves—"Alas!" he replied, "My coffers are empty; but these you may sell: if you refuse, I renounce them." At these words, pushing away the youthful slaves, he groped along the wall with his staff. There is a generosity that is questionable in its excess; when it surpasses the limits of discretion. A true generosity is regulated by justice.

II. It is questionable generosity where the right of disposal is doubtful. According to the law, Solomon had no right to give away these cities, or any part of the inheritance of Israel (Lev. xxv. 23). But this was not the first nor last instance in which this great king stepped aside from the law of Moses. Already, contrary to the express commands of the law, he had multiplied horses and chariots. In the case before us the appearance of transgression is somewhat modified when we remember that these cities, when given to Hiram, were not peopled by Israelites, but by heathens. Solomon may have regarded it as a prudent policy to hand over the government of these heathen cities, which were evidently of no great worth, to his friendly neighbour who had rendered him so much service in building the Lord's house. It is worse than a questionable generosity, it is a positive injustice, for a man to give away in charity what ought to be paid in discharge of his just debts. It is easy for a man to be lavish with money that is not his own, but which in all fairness belongs to his creditors. It is the impulse of benevolence blinding the sense of justice.

III. It is questionable generosity where the gift creates disappointment rather than pleasure. "And Hiram came out of Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him; and they pleased him not" (verse 12). It is not always that a generous spirit meets with the appreciation and gratitude it merits; but it strives so to administer its gifts as to meet the wants and promote the happiness of the recipient. There is a way of bestowing benefits in which the giver makes himself appear as the obliged party. On the other hand, a gift may be so inadequate in comparison with the resources of the donor and the merits of the recipient as to produce chagrin and displeasure. Hiram might naturally have coveted some of Solomon's coast towns—perhaps had cast his eyes on the noble bay of Acco or Ptolemais—and was therefore dissatisfied with the gift of a comparatively useless inland region. It would be well for us to have as light an esteem of all things temporal as Hiram had of these twenty cities!

IV. An act of questionable generosity need not interfere with a long-tried friendship. "And Hiram sent to the king six score talents of gold"

(verse 14). Apparently to show that, although disappointed, he was not offended. The sum sent was very large—above a million and a quarter of our money, according to Mr. Poole's estimate of the weight of the Hebrew gold talent, or about £720,000 according to the estimate preferred by Mr. S. Clarke. At any rate, it was more than equal to a sixth part of Solomon's regular revenue (chap. x. 14). The cities despised by Hiram were restored to Solomon, who rebuilt and colonized them with Israelities (2 Chron. viii. 2). No doubt Solomon compensated Hiram in some other way. Their friendship was not sacrificed by what might have been thought an act of parsimoniousness on the one hand, or an act of ungrateful contemptuousness on the other. In the dearest friendships, anomalies will occur which are difficult to reconcile. The conduct of a friend may seem questionable and blameworthy. Then is the time to exercise patience and forbearance, to put the best construction on the most unfavourable appearances, and wait calmly the issue of events. Many a valuable friendship has been wrecked by a single injudicious act; and a wound inflicted which has rankled in the heart for years. It is a bitter experience when the soul realizes for the first time the heartless infidelity of a long trusted friend!

> Is all the counsel that we two have shared,
> The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent
> When we have chid the hasty-footed time
> For parting us—O! is all forgot?
> All school-days' friendship, childhood innocence?
> ——And will you rend our ancient love asunder
> To join with men in scorning your poor friend?
> *Midsummer Night's Dream.*

LESSONS:—1. *It requires great wisdom to be truly generous.* 2. *Generosity is often abused, both in the donor and in the recipient.* 3. *A genuine friendship is too valuable to be forfeited by trifles.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 10. **The demeanor of Solomon and Hiram towards each other.** 1. Friends and neighbours should be of one mind, and mutually ready to help each other. II. Let not him who has kindly aided thee with his substance be long awaiting the proofs of thy gratitude, and render to him more rather than less, even if he need it not. III. Regard not so much the gift which thou receivest, as the disposition of the giver, remembering always, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Verse 10. **A generous spirit.** 1. Is careful in estimating. 2. Liberal in providing. 3. Prompt in giving. 4. Is one of the noblest fruits of Christianity.

Verse 13. These twenty cities were mere villages, of course, and it is a genuine Eastern trick to dignify a small present with a pompous name. And so the remonstrance of Hiram with Solomon is very natural: "What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother?" and then he fastens upon the gift a name of contempt—Cabul, *vile or displeasing*—a mode of expressing and of perpetuating dissatisfaction eminently Oriental.—*The Land and the Book.*

— From the heathen Hiram, many Christians may learn, even where real cause for dissatisfaction and just claims exist, to state the disproportion between gifts and recompenses with friendly words and in a kindly manner.

Verse 14. **Friends who through long years have aided each other** must not be estranged, even when one thinks himself injured by the other, but must strive to come to a thorough understanding and agreement.—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 15—28.

THE IMPERATIVE EXIGENCIES OF REGAL MAGNIFICENCE.

Solomon had the wisdom to conceive how his little inland kingdom could be raised into greatness and importance; and it excites our admiration to observe the skilful combinations by which he accomplished his aims. His relations with Egypt, Arabia, and Tyre, by which he seemed to open up the resources of the East and the West, tended to the rapid aggrandisement of his empire. One luxury demanded another; and the increase of riches seemed to beget the desire for more. In these verses we have some indications of the manifold exigencies of regal magnificence.

I. There is the demand for architectural display (verses 15, 17-19). The character of a nation is known by its public buildings. The great nations of antiquity have been famous for the grandeur of their erections. No other Israelitish king ever built so much as Solomon. The sacred narrative would not have given such prominence to his buildings but for their relation to the Theocratic kingdom. They were designed to further the greatness, power, and splendour of the Theocracy of which the Temple—the House of Jehovah—was the ostensible centre. After first building the Temple, his *chef-d'œuvre*, Solomon erected his own royal palace, fortified Jerusalem, and built cities and fortresses in different parts of his dominions. And yet where are these vast structures to-day? They have succumbed to the violence of dynastic changes, and the relentless ravages of time. From the gorgeous temple of Moriah to the massive and elaborate edifices of Tadmor in the Wilderness, whose ruins now lie "lonely and forsaken, like bleached bones on a long-neglected battle-field," the same fate has overtaken them. It is not possible to conceive higher ideas of Solomon's magnificence than these ruins present, nor more humiliating ideas of the vanity and weakness of all human splendour.

II. There is the employment of forced labour (verses 15, 20, 21). The greater portion of the levies of men employed by Solomon in his public works were drawn from the subjugated nations; but still the Israelites were not exempt. This was, perhaps, the first time the Israelites were called upon to perform forced labour. It had been prophesied, when they desired a king, that, if they insisted on having one, he would "take their men-servants and their maid-servants, and their goodliest young men, and put them to work" (1 Sam. viii. 16); and David had bound to forced service "the strangers that were in the land of Israel" (1 Chron. xxii. 2); but hitherto the Israelites had escaped. Solomon now, in connection with his proposed work of building the Temple, with the honour of God as an excuse, laid this burden upon them. As to the system adopted, see chap. v. 13, 14. This, though a light form of task work, was felt by the Israelites to be a great oppression. But the great works of an imperious prince must proceed, and he who will not voluntarily help must be compelled. Every form of human slavery is degrading. Most of the great buildings of antiquity are the work of slaves. Will the works of freemen be more enduring?

III. There is the maintenance of a costly court (verses 22, 23). The court of Solomon was on a scale of magnificence never attempted in Israel before or since his day. The great officers are now for the first time called by one general name—*Princes*. The union of priestly and secular functions still continued. The Palace was next in point of splendour to the Temple, and the Porch of the Palace was the gem and centre of the whole empire. The

royal banquets were of the most superb kind. All the plate and drinking vessels were of gold. There was a constant succession of guests. The train of servants was such as had never been seen before. There were some who sat in the king's presence, others who always stood, others who were his cup-bearers, others musicians. His stables were on the most splendid scale. In the midst of this gorgeous array was the sovereign himself. The king is fair, with superhuman beauty; his sword is on his thigh; he rides in his chariot, or on his war-horse; his archers are behind him, his guards are round him; his robes are so scented with the perfumes of India or Arabia that they seem to be nothing but a mass of myrrh, aloes, and cassia. The queen, probably from Egypt, the chief of all his vast establishment of wives and concubines, themselves the daughters of kings, was by his side, glittering in the gold of Ophir—one blaze of glory, as she sat by him in the interior of the palace; her attendants, gorgeously arrayed, are behind her; she has left her father and her father's house; her reward is to be in the greatness of her descendants. Such is the splendour of Solomon's court, which, even down to the outward texture of their royal robes, lived in the traditions of Israel (*Stanley in loco*). The dignity of royalty should be maintained in accordance with the wealth and resources of the nation.

IV. There is the call for elaborate defence. 1. *A standing army must be maintained* (verses 22, 23). The three military bodies remain as in the days of David. The commander of the host is the priestly warrior, Benaiah, who succeeded the murdered Joab. The six hundred heroes of David's early life only once pass across the scene. Sixty of them attended Solomon's litter, to guard him from banditti on his way to Lebanon. The guard appear only as household troops, employed on state occasions. 2. *Strong fortifications must be erected* (verses 15, 19). Jerusalem, the capital, is surrounded by massive walls and strengthened with a huge tower. Garrison cities are built in various parts of the country to keep the insurrectionary inhabitants in check, and to protect the nation against invaders. As a people grows in riches and in power, every necessary preparation is made at least to defend its possessions. The wealth of a nation tempts the cupidity of greedy and ambitious marauders.

V. There is the burden of an oppressive taxation (verse 15, comp. with chap. xii. 1-4). The vast levies of men raised by Solomon to build the Temple, the palace, and the fortifications of Jerusalem and other cities, must have severely taxed the people, and this grievous yoke perhaps grew heavier with Solomon's advance of years. The people who once clamoured for a king, that they might be like the nations around them, now began to realize the truth of Samuel's prediction as to the cost of maintaining a king and court (1 Sam. viii. 11-18). This taxation was so heavy that it appears to have been the principal cause of the revolt of the ten tribes on the death of Solomon. "The government of the wise king was rapidly becoming as odious to the Israelites as that of the race of Tarquin, in spite of all their splendid works, to the patricians of Rome. Mutterings of the coming storm were already heard, both abroad and at home." No government can long flourish that rests on the tyranny and oppression of the people. An excessive taxation drains the fountain of a nation's productive power.

VI. There is the necessity for extended commerce (verses 26-28). The exhaustion of the ample means left by his father, and the inadequacy of the ordinary sources of revenue to cover his vast expenses in sacred and regal building, as well as to sustain the great expense of his magnificent court and numerous household, led Solomon to turn his attention to commerce. His sagacity taught him that the Phœnicians, with whom he had become

acquainted, had risen to extraordinary prosperity and great wealth solely as the result of commerce. He therefore joined Hiram in building and equipping a fleet of ships which sailed from the Red Sea, and brought in the rich productions from the far East. Necessity is the mother of invention for nations as for individuals. The grandest commercial ventures have sprung out of the pressing necessity of the hour. The increase of commerce is the increase of fresh necessities: commerce begets commerce. It is the life of national prosperity.

LESSONS:—1. *Royalty has its undoubted rights and privileges.* 2. *The glory of royalty is to promote the best welfare of the people.* 3. *The government that suppresses commerce beggars itself.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 15-19. National architecture. 1. Is an evidence of the wealth and genius of a nation. 2. Has a powerful influence in the culture of the national taste and character. 3. May remain when the true greatness of a nation has passed away.

Verses 15-23. The plans and arrangements of Solomon for the benefit and protection of the land. 1. He built the house of the Lord, forth from which would come all salvation for Israel; then he built the store-houses for times of need and famine, and as protection against the enemies of the kingdom. A wise prince cares alike for the religious and spiritual, and for the material and temporal well-being of his people, and in times of peace does his utmost to provide against every danger which may assail the land, either from without or within. For this a nation can never be grateful enough, and should uphold him with readiness and might, instead of murmuring and complaining, as is often the case. 2. Solomon's plan was, in his undertaking, to spare his nation all servile labour as far as possible. Therefore for all compulsory service he employed the conquered enemy, who, as such, were slaves. A wise prince will never impose burdensome taxes or heavy labour upon his people, and reigns much more willingly over freemen than over slaves; but a good and loyal people does not make freedom a pretext for villainy, and ever follows the king's call for arms when the defence of "Fatherland" is concerned. For Israel can no more say with truth, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer" (Psa. xviii. 3), if all the nation does not aid in its defences and fortifications. In the kingdom of the true and eternal Prince of Peace bondage will cease, and all men shall obtain the freedom of the children of God.—*Lange.*

Verse 16. Though in the East husbands generally pay for their wives, yet dower is given in some cases. Sargon gave Cilicia as a dowry with his daughter when he married her to Ambris, king of Tubal. Antiochus Soter gave his claims on Macedonia as a dowry to his stepdaughter Phila, when she married Antigonus Gonatas. Cœle-Syria and Palestine were promised as dowry to Ptolemy Epiphanes when he married Cleopatra, sister of Antiochus the Great. The Persian kings seem generally to have given satrapial or other high offices as dowries to the husbands of their daughters.—*Rawlinson.*

Verses 20, 21. **The curse of slavery.** 1. *It is personally degrading.* It robs man of his self-respect, poisons his sense of rectitude and honour, demoralizes his sensibilities, imbrutes his entire nature, and brands him with unutterable infamy. 2. *It is degrading to the oppressor.* It is an insult to his own manhood, it lowers his estimate of humanity, it blunts his sympathies for the race, and leads him to the

shameless commission of other wrongs. The hideous character of oppressors is depicted in a few words by Wordsworth—

> The good old rule
> Sufficeth them, the simple plan,
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can.

3. *It is an element of weakness and decay in the nation.* The nations of antiquity in which slavery was maintained have come to ruin. It blights the fairest country, spoils its chivalry, and saps its strongest foundations.

Verse 25. **The public worship of God.** 1. Is the duty of all—king and subjects. 2. Cannot be neglected without mischievous results (chap. iii. 2-4). 3. Should be observed with regularity and solemnity. 4. Is the secret of national prosperity and greatness. 5. Is fraught with blessing to the individual worshipper.

— A king must make religion the rule of government, and not to balance the scale; for he that casteth in religion only to make the scales even, his own weight is contained in those characters —*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*; he is found too light; his kingdom shall be taken from him.—*Bacon.*

Verse 26. A wise government seeks not only to preserve existing prosperity, but also to discover new sources thereof. Many there are who travel over land and sea to seek gold and to become rich, and forget that the Lord hath said, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich" (Rev. iii. 18). Expeditions into far countries must serve not only to obtain gold and treasure, but also to carry thither the treasure which neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal (Matt. vi. 19). Commerce may become a rich blessing for a nation, but a greedy thirst for gold often leads to extreme luxury and neglect of God, as is many times exemplified in the history of Israel.—*Lange.*

Verses 26-28. **Commerce.** 1. Taxes the ingenuity of a people. 2. Stimulates travel and discovery. 3. Is the source of a nation's wealth. 4. Promotes international amity and brotherhood.

Verse 28. The controversy concerning the locality of Ophir will probably never be settled. It has been placed in Arabia, in India, in the Burmese Peninsula, at Ceylon, on the East coast of Africa, in Armenia, in Phrygia, in Iberia, and in South America, where it has been identified with Peru! Among these various opinions three predominate, all moderns, except a very few, being in favour either of Arabia, India, or Eastern Africa. Africa has comparatively few advocates, but M. Quartremere and Dean Milman are among them. India is preferred by Lassen, Thenius, Ewald, and Berthau. Arabia's claims are supported by the greatest number, among whom are Winer, Keil, Kalisch, and Mr. Twistleton. The grand argument in favour of Arabia is derived from the occurrence of Ophir in the manifestly Arabian list of names in Genesis x. 25-29. To the objection that Arabia could not produce either gold or almug trees, it is replied—1. It has not yet been proved that she could not produce them; and 2. At any rate she might have furnished them to the Jews from an emporium. —*Speaker's Comm.* We do not contend that Ophir was a place on the Indian coast. Nay, more, we do not insist that it was *any* particular place. It seems to us that Heeren is quite right in his remark that Ophir, like the name of all other distant places or regions of antiquity—as Thule, Tartessus, and others—denotes no particular spot, but only a certain region or part of the world, such as the East or West Indies in modern geography. Hence Ophir was a general name for all the countries lying on the African, Arabian, or Indian seas, so far as at that time known.—*Kitto.*

— Even the gold of Ophir perishes in the using; but the treasures of grace never wax old nor decay. He that is possessed of these hath that fine gold which constitutes the true riches (Rev. iii. 18).

CHAPTER X.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA AND SOLOMON.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Queen of Sheba**—The Arabs and Abyssinians both claim this queen, and surround this historic visit with rival legends (comp. Stanley's *Jewish Church*, pp. 259-262). The former name her Balkis; the latter, Maqueda. But the country here denoted is שְׁבָא in Arabia Felix, *Saba*, the capital of the Sabean kingdom of Yemen, and not סְבָא (with which Josephus confounds it)—*i.e.*, Meroë in African Ethiopia, viz., Abyssinia. **Fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord**—Words לְשֵׁם יְהוָה difficult of interpretation: *De Wette*, to Jehovah's honour; *Ewald*, through the glory of Jehovah; *Weil*, by Jehovah so glorifying Himself in him; *Gesenius*, by Jehovah's favour; *Keil*, in regard to the name of the Lord. **Hard questions**—Riddles or enigmas. Verse 2. **Spices, very much gold, and precious stones**—Saba, or Μαριάβα, in Arabia Felix, was abundant in these valuables, and its inhabitants were celebrated among Hebrews and Greeks for extensive trade in these products. Verse 4. **House**—*i. e.*, his own palace, for things mentioned in verse 5 belonged to the palace. Verse 5. **His ascent by which he went up**, &c.—All the *versions* (Sept., Chald., Syr., and Vulg.) read *burnt offerings which he offered up in*, &c.; but Keil, Winer, Ewald, and others, retain the reading in A. V. Probably it was an arched viaduct leading from the palace to the temple (2 Kings xvi. 18), the remains of which have recently been discovered. Verse 10. **An hundred and twenty talents of gold**=£720,000: and **spices**—בְּשָׂמִים, from בֹּשֶׂם, probably balsam. Verse 11. **Almug trees**—2 Chron. ix. 10, 11, has "algum wood," most probably red *sandal wood*. Verse 12. **Pillars**—מְסִלָּה. This word occurs here only, and its meaning is doubtful, though its root, מָעַד, means to support, make sure. Keil and Ewald think *balustrades;* Jarchi and Lange, *tessellated pavements*. Verses 14, 15. **Solomon's revenue**—666 talents=£3,996,000. Verse 15. **Beside . . . of the merchantmen, and . . . . merchants**—the words rendered "merchantmen," אַנְשֵׁי הַתָּרִים have been conjectured to mean "fines of the subject" (provinces); but, literally, they signify "*men of the travellers*," *i. e.*, travelling traders dealing in the larger merchandise; then the word "merchants"—לְכָלִים—will mean "pedlers" dealing in inferior wares. Yet הַתָּרִים is used in Numb. xiv. 6 of the men Moses sent to view and report upon the land; hence some critics would here render the word by "ambassadors" instead of "merchantmen." **All the kings of Arabia**—מַלְכֵי הָעֲרָב, not "of Arabia," the points will not allow of that rendering; עֲרָב is a mixed multitude; and these "kings" were *kings over mixed races*—the bordering tribes, Bedouins. These "tributary kings and governors of the country" would bring from their respective provinces, periodically, presents of the produce of their territories (see note on chap. iv. 7-19). Verse 16. **Targets**—"צִנָּה is a large square shield, rounded down upon its length, covering the whole body" (*Lange*). Verse 18. **The best gold**—Gold of Uphaz. The "*throne of ivory*" is not to be understood as of solid massive ivory, but inlaid. Verse 22. **A navy of Tharshish**—Tartessus in Spain, the ancient Phœnician emporium, where silver was so freely obtained; but the better interpretation of the word is *Tharshish navy*, a common phrase, equivalent to a strongly built fleet. "Silver" could have been gained from Spain, but not the gold, apes, peacocks, or ivory; these were obtainable in Africa. Verse 28. **Horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn**—A decided error here in the translation: מִקְוֵה cannot be "linen yarn," it means a "troop;" hence the verse reads, "As for the export of the horses which Solomon got from Egypt, a troop of royal merchants used to fetch a troop (of horses) at a price." The chapter thus indicates the vast wealth, splendour, and luxury of Solomon's court.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-13

The Love of Wisdom.

I. Exceeds the love of wealth and station. Here was a woman occupying the most illustrious position, the queen of a country so highly favoured that it was called "The Happy Land," and possessing unlimited resources, as the splendour of her retinue and the richness of her presents indicated, smitten with a love of that which was to her more precious than crown or sceptre. There are wants in man which neither riches nor honours can satisfy. The deep questionings and eager longings of the heart can be met only by the solutions of a higher wisdom. "It is a good thing to doubt, better to be resolved. The mind that never doubts, shall learn nothing: the mind that ever doubts, shall never profit by learning. Our doubts only serve to stir us up to seek truth: our resolutions settle us in the truth we have found. There were no pleasure in resolutions if we had not been formerly troubled with doubts. There were nothing but discomfort and disquietness in doubts, if it were not for the hope of resolution. It is not safe to suffer doubts to dwell too long upon the heart; there may be good use of them as passengers, dangerous as inmates. Happy are we if we can find a Solomon to remove them."—*Bp. Hall.* Many sacrifice wealth, comfort, position, and even health itself, in a life-long pursuit after truth.

II. Inspires the soul with courage and enterprize in its search. Undismayed by distance or the difficulties of travel, this rich and powerful queen journeyed from the remotest South to Jerusalem, not for the purpose of merchandise or political alliance, but purely in search of wisdom. "We know merchants who venture to either Indies for wealth; others we know daily to cross the seas for wanton curiosity. Some few philosophers we have known to have gone far for learning; and amongst princes it is no unusual thing to send their ambassadors to far distant kingdoms for transaction of business, either of state or commerce. But that a royal lady should in person undertake and overcome so tedious a journey, only to observe and inquire into the mysteries of nature, art, and religion, is a thing unparalleled. Why do we think any labour great, or any way long, to hear a greater than Solomon? How justly shall the Queen of the South rise up in judgment and condemn us who may hear wisdom crying in our streets, and neglect her!" Man will venture everything for that which he loves. Love is the soul and strength of bravery. The love of wisdom is ennobling.

III. Gives an aptitude in acquiring its rarest treasures (verses 1-3). The queen came as an enquirer, to prove Solomon with hard questions. Great art is required in asking questions; and it is only a passionate love for the science in which we are specially interested that guides the mind to the most important points on which light is needed. In most things "love sees not with the eye, but with the mind;" and its divinings are subtle and wonderfully verified. "The spirit of this asking of questions and solving of dark riddles is of the very nature of the Socratic wisdom itself. 'To ask questions rightly,' said Lord Bacon, 'is the half of knowledge.' 'Life without cross-examination is no life at all,' said Socrates. And of this stimulating process, of this eager enquiry, of this cross-examining of our thoughts, bringing new meanings out of old words, Solomon is the first example. When we enquire, when we question, when we are restless in our search after truth, when we seek it from unexpected quarters, we are but following in the steps of the Wise King of Judah and the Wise Queen of Sheba."—*Stanley.* The enquiries of the royal student were

fully and satisfactorily answered (verse 3). Happy are they whose doubts are resolved, and whose hearts are set at rest.

IV. Reverently acknowledges its Divine origin (verses 4-9). And if this great personage admire the wisdom, the buildings, the domestic order of Solomon, and chiefly his stately ascent into the House of the Lord, how should our souls be taken up with wonder at thee, O thou true Son of David, and Prince of Everlasting Peace, who receivedst the Spirit not by measure, who has built this glorious house not made with hands, even the heaven of heavens, whose infinite Providence hath sweetly disposed of all the family of thy creatures, both in heaven and earth; and who didst ascend on high and leddest captivity captive, and gavest gifts to men.—*Bishop Hall.* True wisdom is from above, and bears the indelible impress of its heavenly origin (James iii. 17). A generous spirit will acknowledge and admire the genius which he finds in another: a devout spirit will trace all gifts to their Divine source, and adore the affluence and wisdom of the Giver.

LESSONS:—1. *Wisdom is worthy of diligent self-denying search.* 2. *A saving knowledge of Christ, who is the wisdom of God, is the highest and only satisfying wisdom.*

This passage may be also homiletically treated as follows:—

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA, A TYPE OF THE HEATHEN SEEKING AFTER TRUTH.

It was no uncommon thing in ancient times for men to travel far in search of wisdom. They would traverse seas, and deserts, and mountains to visit the spots famous for learning, and to converse with men celebrated in philosophy. The increased facilities with which the most distant countries are now reached, and the vast number of people who now travel with such variety of objects, do not admit of the career of a seeker of knowledge being so noticeable as of yore. And yet the search for increased light is not less earnest, and it is certainly more general. The cry of the dying Goethe is the cry of millions to-day, "Light, more light!" The Queen of Sheba is a type of the intense desire with which thousands outside the circle of Christian teaching are seeking after truth.

I. There is the admission of conscious need. The Queen of Sheba possessed everything that could minister to her temporal enjoyment. She had wealth, prosperity, rank, power; but these did not satisfy the cravings of her soul. There was a sense of something still needed in order to attain happiness. That something was the wisdom described and extolled in Prov. iii. 13-18. The sense of need is the spur which goads the soul onward in its weary, painful search for rest. The sinner never seeks forgiveness till he is first conscious of his sin; he never flees for safety till he is roused to a sense of danger. Our fitness to receive the blessings of the gospel is the humble confession of our need. God delights to fill the empty, to feed the hungry, to cheer the disconsolate.

II. There is the eagerness with which the intelligence of clearer light is welcomed. The Sheban Queen "heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord" (verse 1). God hath no use of the dark lanterns of secret and reserved perfections: we ourselves do not light up candles to put them under bushels. The great lights, whether of heaven or earth, are not intended to obscurity; but as to give light unto others, so to be seen themselves. Dan and Beersheba were too strait bounds for the fame of Solomon, which now had flown over lands and seas, and raised the world to an admiration of his more than human wisdom. Even so, O thou Everlasting King of Peace! Thy

name is great among the Gentiles. There is no speech nor language where the report of Thee is not heard. Fame, as it is always a blab, so ofttimes a liar. The wise princess found cause to distrust so uncertain an informer, whose reports are either doubtful or fabulous, and, like winds or streams, increase in passing. This great queen would not suffer herself to be led by ears, but comes in person to examine the truth. How much more unsafe is it, in the most important businesses of our souls, to trust the opinions and reports of others! Those eyes and ears are ill bestowed that do not serve to choose and judge for their owners.—*Bp. Hall.* The anxious enquirer hails with joy the faintest glimmer of light which will conduct him out of the dark labyrinth in which he has been so long wandering; as the inhabitant of the Polar Regions, shut up in darkness for the greater part of the year, rejoices to descry the first rosy rays of dawn kindling on the snow-clad mountain tops, which announce to him the approach of the summer, during which the sun never sets.

III. There is the willingness to seek truth wherever it may be found. "And she came to Jerusalem," &c. (verse 2). She spared neither expense nor trouble; the toils and dangers of travel did not intimidate, the scorn and contempt of the world did not trouble. The soul-hunger for the word of life, the desire to know something about the name of Jehovah, enabled her to overcome all difficulties, and brave all perils. "How superior is this heathen woman to many Christians who hunger and thirst after all possible things, but never after a knowledge of truth and wisdom." The sincere seeker after truth will press through fire and water, will sunder the dearest ties of relationship, will sacrifice the most brilliant prospects in life, to attain the goal where light and rest and peace are to be found (*e.g.*, the history of Sakya-Muni, founder of Buddhism).

IV. There is the joyous acknowledgment of the truth (verses 4-9). 1. *This acknowledgment was the result of overwhelming conviction.* "When the queen had seen all Solomon's wisdom, &c., there was no more spirit in her" (verses 4, 5). She saw, examined, and judged for herself; the evidence was ample, and the conviction irresistible. The reality of Solomon's ability and greatness exceeded all she had heard. The profession of truth that is not based on clear and profound conviction will not be permanent. The true order is laid down by the apostle: "We believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor. iv. 13). 2. *This acknowledgment was freely and generously rendered* (verses 6-8). An unprejudiced mind will readily and cheerfully admit the force of truth. It is weak, it is dishonest, not to act up to the deepest convictions of the soul. The martyrs and confessors bore nobly their testimony in the presence of cruelty and death. 3. *This acknowledgment recognized the Divine source of truth* (verse 9). Perhaps the heathen queen was turned from her dumb idols, henceforth to worship the living and true God. This was a general belief among Jewish writers. God is the fountain of all truth; and He should be praised continually for the abundant revelations with which He has favoured the race.

V. There is the practical manifestation of a grateful heart (verse 10). The queen brought presents of gold, of precious stones, and fragrant spices. The test of our gratitude to God is seen in what we give to him. Few give according to their ability, none in proportion to the blessings received. "How should we bring unto Thee, O Thou King of Heaven, the purest gold of Thine own graces, the sweet odour of our obedience. Was not this withal a type of that homage which should be done unto Thee, O Saviour, by the heads of the nations? The kings of Tarshish and the isles bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts; yea, all kings shall worship Thee, all nations shall serve Thee (Isa. lx.). They cannot enrich themselves, but by giving unto Thee."

True wisdom cannot be bought with gold, but too much gold cannot be spent in its attainment and propagation. It cannot be too dearly bought, not too far fetched.

LESSONS:—1. *Great is the responsibility of that nation which possesses the light of Divine Truth.* 2. *A sincere seeker after Truth shall not seek in vain.* 3. *The eagerness with which the heathen embraces the Truth is a rebuke to the cold indifference of more highly favoured nations.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-13. The Queen of Sheba comes to Solomon. 1. She comes in order to hear the wisdom of Solomon. 2. She finds more than she expected. 3. She worships and praises the Lord for what she has seen and heard. 4. She returns home in peace, with rich gifts. **Solomon receiving the Queen of Sheba a type of Christ** (Matt. xxii. 42). 1. He did not reject her who sought Him, but raised her up (Jno. vi. 37). 2. He solved her questions, and showed her His glory (Jno i. 9, 14; xxii. 46; vi. 68). 3. He accepted her gifts, and gave her much more in return, even all that she desired and requested (Jno. x. 11, 28; xvi. 24; iv. 13).

Verses 1-3. The dissolving of doubts (compared with Dan. v. 16). Doubts and ques ions are the common lot and heritage of humanity. They vary in their subjects and times, but we have them always on hand. We live just now in a specially doubting age, where almost every matter of feeling is openly doubted, or, it may be, openly denied. Science puts everything in question, and literature distils the questions, making an atmosphere of them. We doubt both creation and Creator. We doubt free agency and responsibility, immortality and salvation, the utility of prayer and worship, and even of repentance for sin. And these sweeping, desolating doubts run through all grades of minds, all modes and spheres of life, as it were telegraphically, present as powers of the air to unchristen the newborn thoughts of religion as fast as they arrive. The cultivated and mature have the doubts ingrown they know not how, and the younger minds encounter their subtle visitations when they do not seek them. And the more active-minded they are, and the more thoughts they have on the subject of religion, the more likely they are (unless anchored by true faith in God) to be drifted away from all the most solid and serious convictions even before they are aware of it.

Note the three principal sources and causes whence our doubts arise, and from which they get force to make their assault. They never come of truth or high discovery, but always of the want of it.

1. *All the truths of religion are inherently dubitable.* They are only what are called probable, never necessary truths like the truths of geometry or of numbers. In these we have the premises in our very minds themselves. In all other matters we have the premises to find. Now this field of probable truth is the whole field of religion, and of course it is competent for doubt to cover it in every part and item.

2. *We begin life as unknowing creatures that have everything to learn.* We grope, and groping is doubt; we handle, we question, we guess, we experiment, beginning in darkness and stumbling on towards intelligence. We are in a doom of activity, and cannot stop thinking—thinking of everything—knocking against the walls on every side; trying thus to master the problems, and about as often getting mastered by them. Yeast works in bread scarcely more blindly.

3. *It is a fact that our faculty is itself in disorder.* A broken or bent telescope will not see anything rightly

A filthy window will not bring in even the day as it is. So a mind wrenched from its true lines of action, or straight perception, discoloured and smirched by evil, will not see truly, but will put a blurred, misshapen look on everything. To show not how doubts may be stopped, for that is impossible, but only how they may be dissolved, or cleared away, observe:—

I. *Doubters never can dissolve or extirpate their doubts by inquiry, search, investigation, or any kind of speculative endeavour.* They must never go after the truth to merely find it, but to practise it, and live by it. It is not enough to rally their inventiveness, doing nothing to polarize their aim. They imagine, it may be, that they are going first to settle their questions, and then, at their leisure, to act. As if they were going to get the perfect system, and complete knowledge of truth, before they move an inch in doing what they know! No, there is no fit search after truth which does not, first of all, begin to live the truth it knows.

II. *There is a way for dissolving any and all doubts—a way that opens at a very small gate, but widens wonderfully after you pass.* Every human soul, at a certain first point of its religious outfit, has a key given it, which is to be the *open sesame* of all right discovery. Using this key as it may be used, any lock is opened, any doubt dissolved. Thus every man acknowledges the distinction of right and wrong, feels the reality of that distinction, knows it by immediate consciousness even as he knows himself. Here is the key that opens everything. The true way of dissolving doubts is to begin at the beginning, and do the first thing first. Say nothing of investigation, till you have made sure of being grounded everlastingly, and with a completely whole intent, in the principle of *right doing as a principle.* And here it is that all unreligious men are at fault, and often without knowing, or even suspecting it. They do right things enough in the out-door, market sense of the term, and count that being right. But let them ask the question, "Have I ever consented to be, and am I really now, in the right, as in principle and supreme law; to live for it, to make any sacrifice it will cost me, to believe everything it will bring me to see, to be a confessor of Christ as soon as it appears to be enjoined upon me, to go on a mission to the world's end if due conviction sends me, to change my occupation for good conscience' sake, to repair whatever wrong I have done to another, to be humbled, if I should, before my worst enemy, to do complete justice to God, and, if I could, to all worlds—in a word, to be in wholly right intent, and have no mind but this for ever?" Ah! how soon do they discover possibly, in this manner, that they are right only so far as they can be, and not be at all right as in principle—right as doing some right things, nothing more. As certainly as the new right mind begins, it will be as if the whole heaven were bursting out in day. This is what Christ calls the single eye, and the whole body is inevitably full of light. This is the menstruum by which all doubts may be dissolved. How surely and how fast they fly away, even as fogs are burned away by the sun!

Lessons:—1. *Be never afraid of doubt.* 2. *Be afraid of all sophistries and tricks and strifes of disingenuous argument.* 3. *Have it as a fixed principle that getting into any scornful way is fatal.* 4. *Never settle upon anything as true because it is safer to hold it than not.* 5. *Have it as a law never to put force on the mind, or try to make it believe, because it spoils the mind's integrity; and when that is gone, what power of advance in the truth is left?* 6. *Never be in a hurry to believe, never try to conquer doubts against time.*—Condensed from *Bushnell.*

Verse 4. Words must be followed by works: the beholding with her own eyes, and her very own experience, must be added to the rumours she has heard. Nathaniel, when he heard of Jesus the Messiah, spoke doubtingly at first—Can any good

come out of Nazareth? But when he came and saw, he joyfully exclaimed, "Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel" (Jno. i. 45-49). As in order to form a just conception of visible things we must see them with our own eyes, so also with invisible and Divine things: rightly to recognize them as such, we must feel and taste their strength in our own heart, and not merely hear of them from others (1 Peter ii. 3; Psalms xxxiv. 9).

Verse 5. Great palaces, brilliant arrangements, &c., are objects worthy of real admiration if they are not evidently mere works to gratify the lust of the eye and the pride of life, but rather proofs of wisdom, of spiritual elevation, and of love of art. The scene here described receives very apt illustration from the Assyrian banquet scenes, where we have numerous guests sitting, dressed handsomely in fringed robes, with armlets upon their arms, and bracelets round their wrists, attendants standing behind them, and magnificent drinking cups, evidently of a costly metal, in the hands of the guests, which are filled from a great wine-bowl at one end of the chamber.—*Ancient Monarchies.*

Verse 8. Not because of their fine clothes, of their high position, of their splendid possessions, did the queen regard the people and the servants of Solomon as blessed and happy; but because they could always listen to his wisdom. How much the more are those to be esteemed blessed who, sitting at His feet who Himself contains all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge, can hear the word of everlasting life from His mouth (Luke x. 23).—*Lange.*

Verse 9. **Christ the Head and King of the church.** When the Queen of Sheba came from the South to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and saw his buildings, provisions, ministers, and servants, she acknowledged and praised Jehovah, as the Author of Solomon's advancement. She observes that it was an evidence of God's special regard to him that he was set on the throne of Israel, God's peculiar people; and she further observes that it was a token of God's great and everlasting love to Israel that so wise and pious a prince was set over them. With much more justice may these words be applied to our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God hath "set as King on His holy hill Zion;" and we may say, with humble and devout praise, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which delighteth in Him to make Him Head and King of the church. Because the Lord loved mankind, and was desirous to save them for ever, therefore He made His Son King, to do judgment and justice." Let us see how the words are applicable to Christ, and what reason we have to bless God for so wise and gracious an appointment.

I. **The designation or appointment of Christ to be Head and King of the church was an evident instance of God's delight in Him.** Thus a great honour was conferred upon the Son of God. It is an honour to be any way employed for God. In this view the work of Christian ministers is honourable, and it becomes them to "magnify their office." It is an honour to the angels to be the "ministers of God, and do his pleasure." But signal honour was conferred upon Christ, in being invested with so great authority, exalted to so extensive a dominion, and having all things put under His feet. This was an evidence that He loved righteousness and hated iniquity that God thus exalted Him. For nothing but such a disposition can give one rational being a real excellency and superiority above another. A very great trust was reposed in the Son of God; and that shows God's approbation of Him and delight in Him, no less than recovering God's fallen, sinful creatures to their duty and allegiance, promoting the glory of the great Lord of all, and making so considerable a part of the intelligent creation holy and happy. The Father loved His Son, and hath given all things into

His hands. Again, by this appointment the glory and joy of the Redeemer were advanced. Every soul brought into subjection to Him adds to His revenue of praise and honour. He sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. This was the "the joy set before Him." What superior honour can God confer on any being, than to render him an instrument of communicating great, extensive, and lasting happiness to many others? This is making such a being, in an eminent degree, like Himself. Christ hath a large sphere of service for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. There is joy in heaven whenever it prospers; and whenever the whole redeemed are presented faultless before the presence of the Divine glory, it will be to the exceeding joy of Christ Himself, and the highest evidence of God's delight in Him.

II. The appointment of Christ to be King of the church is a remarkable instance of God's love to man. Because He loved the world, He made Jesus Christ King to do justice and judgment. It was an evidence of God's love to man that He appointed prophets and teachers to instruct and reclaim an ignorant, idolatrous, sinful world. But in proportion to the excellency of the persons commissioned to this work, will the Divine love and grace be apparent. It is a merciful scheme to rescue the world from ignorance, superstition, and vice, to erect a spiritual kingdom in it, to destroy the works of the devil, and to deliver men from the worst slavery. But to manifest His Son for this purpose was an astonishing instance of mercy. The perfections of His nature, and especially His moral excellencies, qualify Him for this work. His example illustrates and recommends His precepts, and He is able to bestow every blessing which we can want; to deliver us from everything that would hinder or lessen our happiness, and confer and continue everything that will promote and secure it. How pertinent and useful are such reflections as these in this connection! Did the Queen of Sheba bless the God of Israel for appointing Solomon to be king over it? And shall not I ardently praise Him for exalting a Son to be a Prince and a Saviour? I would consider from what a slavery He redeems us; from ignorance, error, and a thousand irregular lusts and passions. He redeems us to God, brings us into a state of likeness to Him and friendship with Him. He has made effectual provision that we shall not again be enslaved if we will stand fast in our liberty. I would further consider how wisely and graciously He governs us. His laws are all plain, reasonable, wholesome, excellent, enforced by the most powerful sanctions; and gracious allowances are made for our weakness and imperfection. I would consider also to what a state of glory and happiness he will raise all his faithful subjects. He will bring them to His heavenly courts, fix them beyond the reach of enemies, sorrows, and dangers, in a state of perfect holiness and never-ending joy. How affectionately and gratefully should my soul magnify the Lord for this unspeakable gift!

Reflections.—When the queen of Sheba had complimented Solomon on his wisdom, prosperity, and the happiness of his servants, and praised God for making him king, she "gave him much gold, spices, and precious stones." This was a token of her high veneration for him, and gratitude for the favours she had received from him. Thus, when we have been commemorating the goodness of God in exalting His Son to be the Ruler and Saviour of His people, it becomes us to offer our presents to Him. He requireth not, he needeth not gold, and silver, and precious stones. He requireth that we yield ourselves to Him; that we give Him our hearts, and testify our allegiance and subjection, not by this service only, but the obedience of our whole lives; that we submit to His government, and study to promote the interests of His kingdom. This is what we can give, what we ought to give, what alone he will accept.—*J. Orton.*

Verses 10-13. The interchange of

gifts between the queen and Solomon. 1. The queen is not content with words of praise and thanks; she testifies her gratitude by means of great and royal gifts. Of what avail are mere verbal thanks and praise, if the life be devoid of lovely deeds and of cheerful gifts, for the acknowledgment of God's kingdom? 2. Solomon needed not the gifts; he had more than she could give him (verses 11, 12); he gave her all that heart could desire. What are all our gifts in comparison with those which we receive from the Lord—those which are immeasurably beyond what we ask and seek (Eph. iii. 20), and where it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts xx. 35)!—*Lange.*

Verses 1-13. The anxious enquirer. I. Perplexed. II. Aroused. III. Seeking. IV. Convinced. V. Satisfied.

Verse 13. With a treasure incomparable in value to gold and jewels, the queen joyfully went her way, like the eunuch of Ethiopia. How many are there who return from far journeys into distant lands, rich in gold and substance, but poor in faith and knowledge of the truth! They have lost more than they have won: the queen gained more than she lost.

— The generation of the present day in comparison with the queen of Sheba. I. Its satiety and indifference. II. Its unbelief and its guilt (Matt. xii. 42).—*Lange.*

— The exalted mission of a true philosophy. 1. Is to become acquainted with the highest truth. 2. To freely communicate truth to others. 3. To promote the happiness of nations by the active dissemination of truth. 4. To insist upon the imperative claims of truth.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 14—29.

The Flood-Tide of National Prosperity.

I. Seen in the super-abundance of wealth (verses 14-17; 21-23). Gold was so plentiful that silver was "nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon; he exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches." He was the ideal of an Eastern monarch, all the attributes of greatness were united in him—riches, dignity, ability, fame, splendour. The Old Testament kingdom reached its culminating point in David's Son; all the promises of temporal prosperity were fulfilled in it. Such is the nature of worldly wealth, the more abundant it is, the less valuable it is. Great fears are expressed that recent discoveries in the diamond fields of South Africa will depreciate the value of the precious stone. Oh! how ought the possession of mental and spiritual riches to lessen our love for the perishable things of earth! If we are citizens of the New Jerusalem, the very streets will be pure gold, and the walls the richest jewels; so much will our eternal blessedness exceed all earthly joy and felicity.

II. Seen in the external grandeur of the throne (verses 18-20). In the ruder stages of national life the king would dispense justice and promulgate law by the side of some favourite stream, under the shadow of a well-known tree, on an elevated mound of earth, at the entrance of the city, or by the side of a spear thrust into the ground; but as the monarch and people increased in wealth, these simple, primitive methods gave place to more ceremonious and ornate displays of regal greatness. Solomon's throne was made of ivory inlaid with the best gold. It was erected in the Porch of Judgment, leading out of the Porch of Pillars (chap. vii. 7). Here Solomon sat to receive his officers of state, and foreign ambassadors and princes on important occasions, and especially

to hear and decide the cases that were submitted to his judgment. The dazzling splendour of the throne was well calculated to inspire awe, and was a striking evidence of the wealth and luxury of the time.

III. Seen in the consummate wisdom of the ruler (verse 23-25). The wisdom of Solomon was eminently practical. It suppressed the malcontents, and ensured the peace of the kingdom. It organised a complicated and flourishing system of commerce. It raised the nation to affluence and fame, so that "king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom." This was in accordance with the Divine promise (ch. iii. 13). In the depressed condition at that time both of Egypt and Assyria, it would seem to have been literally true that Solomon's kingdom was, for wealth and splendour, the first in all the world. Grandees from afar flocked to the court of the Israelitish king to listen to the profound wisdom that fell from his lips, and to learn the secret of his brilliant rule. In an age when so much depended on the character and policy of the sovereign, to be gifted with almost superhuman wisdom was a sure way of securing increased prosperity and power. Happy is the nation that, with an expanding and profitable commerce, possesses a wise and considerate king.

IV. Seen in the prevalence of expensive luxuries (verses 21, 22; 26-29). The drinking cups were of gold: there was no silver in them. And yet a draught of water is as sweet and refreshing from the moss-covered cistern among the hills as from the most richly-chased goblet of gold. The fleets of Solomon supplied Jerusalem with the rarities and dainties of foreign lands—gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. Wordsworth sees a sort of irony and sarcasm in the mention of apes and peacocks as "the climax of the produce of the commerce of Solomon. Apes and peacocks to Solomon, the wise king at Jerusalem! To gratify curiosity, to amuse the people, and, perhaps, to while away the time of the strange women to whom Solomon clave in love, instead of cleaving to the Lord." He indulged in the costly extravagance of chariots and horses, with which he established a new species of military force, strongly discouraged by the law of Moses, and from which all previous rulers of this people had abstained. The country was mountainous, and wholly unsuited for cavalry. It was also a time of peace; and all the great victories of his father and other conquerors had been won in reliance upon the strength of the Lord's arm, without using any such force, and in opposition to the enemy who employed it (Psa. xx, 7). Besides, such a number of chariots and horses was out of all proportion to so small a country; and perhaps no act of royal indulgence was more unpopular among the people. This was doubtless a strong element in the spirit of discontent which afterwards shattered the empire. Prosperity has its accompanying perils, and not the least of these is the tendency to indulge in costly and emasculating luxuries.

V. Marks the beginning of national decline. As the flood-tide of the ocean begins to ebb soon after it has registered its highest water-mark, and as the earth sinks towards the darkness and cold of winter the moment after it has risen to its highest point in the summer solstice, so the period in which a nation bursts forth into its grandest display of material splendour presents indications of inevitable decay. Wealth, fame, and the most massive works of man are perishable, while wisdom, righteousness, and moral goodness bloom with immortal beauty.

LESSONS:—1 *There is the wisdom of gold, and the gold of wisdom.* 2. *National prosperity is ever attended with serious perils.* 3. *The religious character of a nation survives the decay of its external glory.*

The Ivory Throne a Symbol of Regal Government.

One of the most attractive objects in the Palace of Solomon was the great ivory throne. It was a massive and imposing structure, and exceeded in splendour anything of the kind in any other kingdom. It was in the form of an ancient round-topped, two-armed chair, with the figure of a lion on either side, probably of cast metal gilt; and fixed on an elevated platform, the ascent to which consisted of six steps, each step being adorned with the life-sized figure of a lion, facing another at the opposite end of the step. The chair of state, and the steps up to it, were covered with ivory and gold. Representations of thrones are frequent in the Egyptian and Assyrian sculptures. They have no steps up to them, but frequently stand upon square bases. The back appears to be flat at the top, not rounded. Assyrian thrones have "stays" or arms on either side, and they stand generally on lions' feet. Ivory was a material used in them; but they were chiefly of wood and metal. We read in after years of the Parthian kings, whose throne was of gold, encompassed with four golden pillars adorned with precious stones; and of the Persian kings who sat in judgment under a golden vine and other trees of gold, the bunches of grapes and other fruits being formed of different kinds of precious stones. We may regard the throne of Solomon as *a symbol of regal government.*

I. That regal government should be righteous in its principles. 1. *In order to maintain the dignity of the throne.* Ivory and gold were emblems of purity, and point out the incorruption that should belong to kings, whose duty it is to administer justice with the utmost strictness and purity. The dignity of the judge consists, not in the richness of his robe or in the splendour of his surroundings, but in the justness and integrity of his decisions. Where partiality and injustice predominate, the dignity is transferred to the innocent prisoner, who is unrighteously accused and condemned. 2. *In order to enforce the authority of the law.* A selfish, corrupt, time-serving government has endless difficulty, and has to resort to the most brutal methods in enforcing its authority. Its laws are an insult, and their maintainance an intolerable cruelty. The throne is secure in itself, and in the willing obedience of the people, only as it is based in righteousness. That king is truly glorious who makes his subjects affluent and happy under his wise and righteous administration. Solomon on his ivory throne is typical of Him who is greater than Solomon, seated on the great white throne of Judgment, pronouncing sentence on the eternal state of men and angels (Rev. xx. 2). Justice and judgment are the habitation of the Divine throne (Ps. lxxxix. 14).

II. That regal government should be imposing in its administration. 1. *In outward ceremony.* The glittering throne, the stately figure of the king, the numerous attendants, and the solemnity of the order of proceeding could not fail to impress the spectators with the awful majesty and power of law. The magistrate is to be a terror to evil-doers (Rom. xiii. 3). All legitimate external means should be adopted that will tend to beget a wholesome reverence of law, not simply to create a slavish dread. It is said that Attila, king of the Huns, had a custom of fiercely rolling his small, deep-set eyes, as if he wished to enjoy the terror he inspired. Law has nothing terrifying in it to the innocent. 2. *In moral significance.* The lions which supported and adorned the throne not only signified its stability, but also the vigilance with which the prince watched over the interests of the kingdom, and the courage and power with which he defended his people. The arms of Assyrian thrones are occasionally supported by figures of animals. The throne of Rameses II., at Medinet Abou, has a sphinx at the side, and a lion below the sphinx. As the lion is the natural king of beasts, so

the figure of the lion is naturally adopted by any imaginative race as an emblem of sovereignty. The object of all true government should be, not simply to indulge in outward display, but to teach, in every possible way, the lessons of truth, righteousness, and virtue. The throne should be more conspicuous for moral excellencies than for ivory and gold.

III. That regal government should be beneficent in its aims. The twelve lions represented the twelve tribes of Israel united under one sovereign. The ruler should aim at uniting the people under his care into a law-abiding, industrious, and virtuous nation. Government is instituted, not to gratify the ambition and lust of the few, but to promote the best welfare of the many. No government can be permanent that does not aim at this. Thrones may fall, dynasties pass away, but righteousness abides for ever.

LESSONS:—1. *Justice is the weapon and defence of all true government.* 2. *Great is the responsibility and glorious the reward of the righteous ruler.* 3. *The throne of Jesus is impregnable, and will survive all the thrones of earth.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 14-29. The glory of Solomon. I. *Wherein it lay.* Power, dominion, pomp, splendour, glory, and honour, everything that men wish or desire in this world, all these we see before us in the life of this one man. But the glory of man is as the grass of the field, which fades and withers; truly, the lilies of the field exceed it in glory, and Solomon himself confessed, "All is vanity" (Eccles i. 2; ii. 11; Ps. xlix. 17, 18).

II. *Its significance for us.* That we should seek after that other and imperishable glory, prepared for us by Him who is greater than Solomon (Jno. xvii. 24). Scarcely one of many thousands can attain to the glory of Solomon, but to the glory of God we are all called (1 Thess. ii. 12). If our life be hidden with Christ in God, then, &c. (Col. iii. 3, 4). Therefore shall we rejoice in the hope of future glory, and not only so, but in tribulations also (Rom. v. 2, 3; 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18).

Power and dominion. I. *The responsibility involved therein.* To whom much is given, of him shall much be required (Luke xii. 48). Singular endowments bring with them singular requirements. Authority is power given for the use and benefit of inferiors; wealth is bestowed upon the rich that they may relieve necessity according to their means.

II. *The perils connected with it.* Pride and haughtiness, forgetfulness of God, and unbelief (Ps. lxii. 11; lii. 9; 1 Tim. vi. 9; Matt. xvi. 26). Therefore envy not the rich and powerful, for they are exposed to many temptations (1 Tim. vi. 6). Devout Christians may have and hold gold and silver, lands and possessions, cattle, in short everything, and with a good conscience, if only they do not misuse them by idle pomp or for the oppression of their fellow-creatures, for they are gifts and favours of God, which He lends them (Hagga. iii. 8; Ps. l. 10). The throne of Solomon, stately and magnificent as it was, is long since crumbled to dust; but His throne before whose judgment seat we must all appear, endures to all eternity. The man to whom God has given great wealth and high position in the world may indeed dwell in splendour; but every man sins whose expenses exceed his income, or are greater than his position requires. Golden vessels are not necessaries of life, nor do they conduce to greater happiness or content than do earthen and wooden ones. It is the duty and right of a prince to bring an armed force to the defence of the country against her enemies; but prince and people must ever remember what the mighty Solomon himself says: "The horse is prepared against

the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord" (Prov. xxi. 31; Psa. xxxiii. 16-19; Isaiah xxxi. 1).—*Lange.*

Verse 20. One lion at each end of each of the six steps by which the king ascended the throne. They were symbolic figures, and in that position might teach that resolute and determined courage and firmness should characterize all the actions of the king.

Verse 22. It is said by some authorities that these Hebrew words for ivory, apes, and peacocks, are identical with the Tamil names by which they are known in Ceylon at the present day. It has long since been decided, says Cuvier, that India was the cradle of the peacock. It is in the countries of Southern Asia, and the vast archipelago of the Eastern Ocean, that this bird appears to have fixed its dwelling, and to live in a state of freedom. All travellers who have visited these countries make mention of these birds.

— Like unto these ships thus laden are the books of some sectaries, wherein, as in the Jewish Talmud, *sunt mala mista bonis, sunt bona mista malis.* In some parts of their writings are wholesome and good passages; as in a wood or forest full of briers and brambles there may be some violets and primroses; and as here, with apes and peacocks, were gold, silver, and ivory. —*Trapp.*

Verse 23. Wealth and wisdom compared and contrasted. I. *Compared.* 1. Both are the gifts of God. 2. Both involve much care and toil. 3. Both are scources of great power. 4. Both are liable to great abuse. II. *Contrasted.* 1. Wealth and wisdom not necessarily possessed by the same person. 2. Wealth may adorn the body; wisdom adorns the mind. 3. Wealth may buy influence, wisdom commands it. 4. Wealth is material and perishable, wisdom is immortal.

— When King Demetrius had sacked and razed the city of Megaera to the very foundation, he demanded of Stilpo, the philosopher, what losses he had sustained. "None at all," said Stilpo, "for war can make no spoil of virtue." And it is said of Bias, that his motto was, *omnia mea mecum porto*— I carry all my goods with me; viz., his goodness.

— Perfect freedom hath four parts: wisdom, the principle of doing things aright; justice, the principle of doing things equally in public and private; fortitude, the principle of not flying danger, but meeting it; and temperance, the principle of subduing desires and living moderately.—*Plato.*

Verses 23, 24. Every other quality besides is subordinate and inferior to *wisdom*, in the same sense as the mason who lays the bricks and stones in a building is inferior to the architect who drew the plan and superintends the work. The former executes only what the latter contrives and directs. Now, it is the prerogative of wisdom to preside over every inferior principle, to regulate the exercise of every power, and limit the indulgence of every appetite, as shall best conduce to one great end. It being the province of wisdom to preside, it sits as umpire on every difficulty, and so gives the final direction and control to all the powers of our nature. Hence it is entitled to be considered as the top and summit of perfection. It belongs to wisdom to determine when to act, and when to cease; when to reveal, and when to conceal a matter; when to speak, and when to keep silence; when to give, and when to receive; in short, to regulate the measure of all things, as well as to determine the end, and provide the means of obtaining the end pursued in every deliberate course of action. Every particular faculty, or skill, besides, needs to derive direction from this: they are all quite incapable of directing themselves.

The art of navigation, for instance, will teach us to steer a ship across the ocean, but it will never teach us on what occasions it is proper to take a voyage. The art of war will instruct us how to marshal an army, or to fight a battle to the greatest advantage,

but you must learn from a higher school when it is fitting, just, and proper to wage war, or to make peace. The art of the husbandman is to sow and bring to maturity the precious fruits of the earth; it belongs to another skill to regulate their consumption by a regard to our health, fortune, and other circumstances. In short, there is no faculty we can exert, no species of skill we can apply, but requires a superintending hand, but looks up, as it were, to some higher principle, as a maid to her mistress for directions; and this universal superintendent is wisdom.—*Robert Hall.*

Verse 24. A notable type of Christ, so generally frequented and yet still so cheerfully resorted to in His ordinances by His people, flying thereto as so many "clouds, and as doves to their windows" (Isaiah lx. 8).—*Trapp.*

— There is no true wisdom that does not rest calmly on a basis of truthfulness of heart, and is not guarded and nurtured by righteousness and purity of life. Man is one—one and indissoluble. The intellect and the conscience are but two names for diverse parts of the one human being—or, rather, they are but two names for diverse workings of the one immortal soul. And though it be possible that a man may be enriched with all earthly knowledge, whilst his heart is the dwelling-place of all corruption, and that, on the other hand, a man may be pure and upright in heart, whilst his head is very poorly furnished, and his understanding very weak, yet these exceptional cases do not touch the great central truth: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding." Here, then, is the outline of the fair form that rises before you—a wisdom satisfying and entire for all the understanding, and not a dry, hard, abstract wisdom either, but one which is all glowing with light and purity, and is guidance for the will, and cleansing for the conscience, and strength for the practical life: wisdom which is morality and righteousness; morality and righteousness which is the highest wisdom. Go out into the world, I pray you, and strip everything that appeals to you of its disguises, and you will find it true that, where Christ is not, there—let it woo ever so sweetly, and sing ever so melodiously—there is only a siren that tempts you down beneath the sunny surface of pleasure to the black depths below, where she lives on dead mens' bones! There is your choice. On the one side there calls you the god-descended, beautiful, and serene Wisdom, with diadem on her brow, and blessing in her hands, and peace upon her lips—a Wisdom behind which Christ stands with face fairer, yet lips fuller still of grace, a heart gentler than the woman-wisdom that Solomon knew of, and hands full of better blessing than any that dawned upon him; and, on the other side, a loud-voiced, clamorous, painted, deceiving harlot, who calls you to herself to stifle you with her poisonous breath.—*A. Maclaren.*

Verses 24, 25. The charms of philosophy. I. *Are found in the very nature of the science.* 1. It promises so much. 2. It gratifies the pride of intellect. 3. It affords ample scope for speculation. II. *Allure inquirers from the most distant places.* "All the earth sought to Solomon to hear his wisdom." 1. The love of knowledge braves all difficulties. 2. Influences all classes. 3. Is shown by disseminating knowledge, as by seeking it. III. *Evoke the most costly offerings.* "And they brought every man his present." 1. Wisdom is better than gold. 2. Talent deserves suitable acknowledgment. 3. The learner should be grateful. 4. More money is wasted in useless luxuries than is spent in seeking knowledge. IV. *Inspire unremitting devotion in its votaries.* "Year by year." 1. It demands constant attention. 2. Its unsolved problems sustain the interest of the student. 3. It has charms to many as a purely intellectual exercise.

— We are raised by science to an understanding of the infinite wisdom

and goodness which the Creator has displayed in all His works. Not a step can we take in any direction without perceiving the most extraordinary traces of design; and the skill everywhere conspicuous is calculated in so vast a proportion of instances to promote the happiness of living creatures, and especially of ourselves, that we feel no hesitation in concluding that, if we knew the whole scheme of Providence, every part would appear in harmony with a plan of absolute benevolence. Independently, however, of this most consoling inference, the delight is inexpressible of being able to follow the works of the great Author of nature, and to trace the unbounded power and exquisite skill which are exhibited by the most minute as well as the mightiest parts of His system.—*Brougham.*

Verse 25. We have here expressed in words what the Egyptian and Assyrian monarchs recorded by means of elaborate sculptures on slabs and obelisks—the frequent coming to the court of tribute-bearers from the subject kings, who brought not only the fixed rate of bullion whereto each of them was liable, but a tribute in kind besides, consisting of the most precious products of their respective countries. Among these vessels, probably of silver and gold, garments and horses are very conspicuous on the monuments.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 26. The true defence of a nation. 1. Not in chariots and horses—weapons of war. 2. But in the devotion and valour of the people. 3. In the overshadowing presence of God. 4. In the prevalence of righteousness.

Verses 26-29. Trading. 1. An honourable calling. 2. Is a source of wealth to individuals and nations. 3. Encourages industry and enterprise. 4. Expands the knowledge of human nature. 5. Offers many temptations to roguery. 6. Is legitimate only when it is honest.

— How to be a Christian in trade (compared with Matt. xxv. 16). I. *The fair possibility of being a Christian in trade.* 1. There is the very certain fact that there have been good Christians in trade; and if that be so, then it follows, by a very short argument, that what has been can be—that is, can be again and often. 2. All apprehensions of a specially harmful exposure in trade are mistaken. What it calls profits are just as truly earnings as any of the fruits of hand-labour. 3. Little room is there, under anything properly called trade, for what many seem to regard as the necessary skill, in raising colour by glosses of false recommendation, or by small lies sprinkled in for the due stimulation of the customer. That is not an accomplishment belonging to the genuine operation of trade, but only to the low-lived, inbred habit of the man. II. *How to be a Christian in trade.* 1. No man of course expects to be a Christian in trade without being a religious man in it. And just here, alas! is the difficulty most commonly encountered—the difficulty of continuing to be a Christian without beginning to be one; the difficulty of being kept safe in religion, or religious character, by a business carried on without such character, and wholly outside of religion. 2. It is another important consideration that you are permitted, if at all, to go into this occupation by a really Divine call. God has a place for every man, in what is to be his particular employment, as He has a place for every rock, and tree, and river, and star. 3. Being thus installed in trade, as by the call of God, how surely may you have God's help in the prosecution of it. How surely, that is, if you ask it, and train your ways of practice so that you can fitly receive it. All right employments are callings in which God puts His servants for their good, and what will He more surely do than help them to find their good! 4. The merchant in his calling of trade is put in a relation to God so inherently religious, if he will undertake it in that manner, that he is justified in

passing his vow not to be in trade, or even for a day to stay in it, if he cannot have the enjoyment of God in it. 5. There are even special advantages in trade as regards the development of a Christian life, which do not occur as largely in any other employment. The transactions are many, crowding thick upon the shelves and counters all the day. The temptations, of course, are just as much more numerous as the transactions; and it must not be forgotten that the more tempted a man is, the more opportunities are given him to grow. Scarcely could he grow at all if none at all were put in his way. 6. There is also a considerable Christian advantage in the relation that subsists between the merchant and his customer. To be a customer signifies more or less of favour and confidence. The customer, in being such, commits himself in a large degree to the honour of the merchant, and then the merchant in turn accepts him naturally as a man who comes in expression of trust, and is fairly entitled to generosity. 7. Trade also furnishes occasions of beneficence to the poor, which are all the better to both parties, that they make no parade of charity, but may pass for a buying and selling between them It is trade on the one side, and trade on the other; only that on one side it is so near to the confines of beneficence that it consciously passes over. A more gentle, genial, and genuine influence on the man could hardly be devised. 8. It is yet another and very great moral advantage of trade, that it is just the calling in which a Christian man will best learn the uses of money. Hence it is going to be discovered, that the great problem we have now on hand, viz., the Christianizing of the money power of the world, depends for its principal hope on the trading class in society. Talent has been Christianized already on a large scale. The political power of states and kingdoms has been long assumed to be, and now at last really is, as far as it becomes their accepted office to maintain personal security and liberty. Architecture, arts, constitutions, schools, and learning have been largely Christianized. But the money power, which is one of the most operative and grandest of all, is only beginning to be; though with promising tokens of a finally complete reduction to Christ and the uses of His kingdom. Trade expanding into commerce, and commerce rising into communion, are to be the outline of the story. When the merchant seeking goodly pearls—all the merchant race—find the precious one they seek, and sell their all to buy it, they will make it theirs.—*Bushnell.*

— **Luxury and extravagance.** 1. Always go together. 2. Depreciate the true value of things. 3. Flourish on the oppression and distress of others. 4. Excite popular discontent. 5. End in disgrace and ruin.

Verse 27. This strong hyperbole marks in the most striking way the great wealth and prosperity of the capital during Solomon's reign. The lavish expenditure which impoverished the provinces, and produced, or helped to produce, the general discontent that led to the outbreak under Jeroboam, enriched the metropolis, which must have profited greatly by the residence of the court, the constant influx of opulent strangers, and the periodical visits of all Israelites, not hindered by some urgent reason, at the great festivals.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 28. It is thought that the first people who used horses in war were the Egyptians; and it is well known that the nations who knew the use of this creature in battle had greatly the advantage of those who did not. God had absolutely prohibited horses to be imported or used; but, in many things, Solomon paid little attention to the Divine command.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DECLINE OF THE HEBREW EMPIRE.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—**Verse 1. But King Solomon loved many strange women**—If importations of foreign luxuries and indulgences into his court (see previous chapter) were occasions of peril to Solomon, tending to corrupt his heart from simple fidelity to Jehovah, far more so this creation of a foreign harem. Among the ancient Hebrews polygamy was permitted; and the number of a man's wives was a standard of his wealth and dignity. Solomon emulated this dangerous and degrading custom; and, being unrivalled in the lavishment of wealth, he seems to have resolved upon excelling in this department of Oriental indulgence, thereby to assert his state magnificence. **Together with the daughter of Pharaoh**—It is not implied that his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter was wrong, but his adding others. Contrary to the law of the Lord (Deut. xvii. 17) he took, "*together with* the daughter of Pharaoh, *many strange* wives." Verse 3. **Seven hundred wives**, princesses—So great a number from noblest princely houses of foreign nations suggests the splendour of his court. It was a vanity, and fraught with greatest snares. Verse 4. **Solomon's old age**—He was probably not over fifty. Verse 5. **Went after Ashtoreth**—Lange thinks he did not himself become an idolater, but allowed every form of idolatry his wives desired; yet, though he offered no sacrifice on the altars he reared, to rear them was equivalent to sacrificing, equally offensive to Jehovah. *Ashtoreth*, Astarte, the highest feminine deity of the Sidonians; *Milcom*, Molech; *Chemosh* (verse 7), the war and fire-god of the Moabites. Verse 11. **Forasmuch as this is done of thee**; or, is purposed of thee. Verse 15. **When David was in Edom**; or, was (at war) with. The *Sept.* and Peshito read, had smitten. *Hadad* was a royal child, rescued from Joab's extirminating slaughter (2 Samuel viii. 13) in Edom, carried into Egypt, and fostered by the Egyptian king. On learning of the death of David and Joab, he quitted Egypt, returned to his own land, and sought to restore the ruined kingdom of his fathers. Foiled in his efforts, he joined himself to Rezon, another of Solomon's adversaries (verses 23-25). Verse 22. **Let me go in any wise**—The *Sept.* and *Codex Vat.* insert here, "And Hadad returned to his own land; this is the mischief which Hadad did; and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Edom." Verse 23. **Another adversary, Rezon**—Comp. 2 Sam. viii. 3, *sq.* Verse 25. **Beside the mischief that Hadad did** יאת־הרעה אשר הדד

—A peculiar phrase, not easy to render; yet A. V. gives the sense fairly; or thus, *But as for this mischief that Hadad did*; or, *And, indeed, along with the evil that Hadad did* (so Bertheau). Verse 26. **Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite**, *i.e.*, an Ephraimite. Hadad and Rezon were "adversaries" to Solomon; but Jeroboam was an internal enemy, a subject and servant who developed into a rebel, and a more dangerous enemy. Being a young man of industry and talent, Solomon entrusted him with the honourable position of superintendent of the engineering works in progress around Jerusalem. He evidently used this eminence to sow sedition, for "*this was the cause*," &c., verse 27. *Lange* suggests that the Ephraimites had an old and irrepressible jealousy of Judah, and very reluctantly submitted to labour in the king's citadel. Compulsory labour increased this dislike to hatred, so that Jeroboam found it easy to fan the flame of insurrection among them. Verse 29. **Ahijah the Shilonite**—Shiloh was in the tribe of Ephraim; hence Ahijah and Jeroboam were of the same tribe—probably, of the same spirit also. Verse 40. **Solomon sought, therefore**, &c.—Jeroboam's inflated pride and restless ambition led him to conspiracies even before Solomon's death, as verse 26 affirms. **Unto Shishak, king of Egypt**, who harboured this seditious rebel, thus showing his own hostility to or jealousy of Solomon. **Shishak** was of a different dynasty from Solomon's father-in-law.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1—8.

THE FALL OF SOLOMON, AND ITS LESSONS.

Everything about Solomon was on a scale of unparalleled greatness. He was great in his descent—the offspring of the renowned David. He was great as a sovereign, raising the kingdom of the Hebrews, which was inaugurated by Saul, and enlarged and consolidated by David, to the highest pitch of imperial greatness and external magnificence it ever attained. He was great in intellectual

endowment—"He was wiser than all men, and his fame was in all nations round about." He was great in Divine benedictions—"For the Lord magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed on him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him" (1 Chron. xxix. 25). And his greatness was not less conspicuous in his sad and terrible fall. The whole career of Solomon is a succession of surprises and mysteries. As soon as he took up the reins of government he gave evidence of the greatness of his powers. The nation felt itself in the grasp of a master, and became pliant and obedient in his hand. And yet, with all the outward show of his consummate abilities and gigantic enterprizes, we have but few details of his personal life. His works impress and delight us: his personality is vague, and only mystifies us. As you have seen on occasions of public rejoicing, among other illuminations, some gigantic figure lit up and sparkling in brilliant outline, while the interspaces of the figure are dark, vacant, and unintelligible: so was it with Solomon. His imposing and majestic figure occupied a large space in the history of the Jewish Kingdom and in the history of the world, and shed the lustre of its imperial glory over all nations and through all succeeding ages; but the minute personal features of that stately form fade away into the darkness—are, in fact, for the most part invisible. The splendour of Solomon's reign was like a glare of sunshine resting on the fertile plains, teeming with life and efflorescent with beauty. While the light remains, the scene is gay, brilliant, captivating; but, all unseen and unsuspected, the poisonous miasma is loading the air, and by-and-by will spread sorrow and disaster in its course. Consider—

I. The causes which contributed to the downfall of the great Hebrew monarch. 1. *The intoxication of intellectual pride.* We have seen how he was gifted with a keen and comprehensive intellect, and was addicted from his earliest youth to the most profound studies. His proverbs were the condensation of the choicest maxims of moral and political science, and have enriched the literature of the world; his songs bear evidence of a lofty, poetic genius; and his discourses and treatises on natural history embraced the most important and most minute facts of the science. It is appalling to think of the powerful ascendency these high qualities must have given him over the minds of others. No wonder the nations crowded around such a prodigy of wisdom (chap. iv. 30-34); and who could inhale the incense of adulation that daily filled his court without being intoxicated with vain thoughts? It cannot, therefore, surprise us that, puffed up with the flattery of courtiers and the applauses of the multitude, Solomon began to think too highly of himself, and to say: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent" (Isa. x. 13). His wisdom having thus become his idol, he persuades himself that it will enable him to solve all mysteries, and to rectify all disorders, and thus to render him the master both of his own destiny and of the destinies of the people—nay, of the whole world. We can imagine how such a notion would captivate a generous, great, and aspiring mind. He sees in the state of society, and in the condition of individual men, evils which he would fain remove, and wrongs which he would fain redress. Many are suffering from disease, many are pining in poverty, many groaning beneath the iron yoke of injustice and oppression. Good men are often treated with neglect, or covered with obloquy, while wicked men are as often high in place and power. Why is all this? What is the source and explanation of these painful anomalies? Cannot I, who have searched out so many deep things, fathom this secret too? Shall it not be the privilege and the prerogative of Solomon the Wise to inaugurate a new and better condition of things?"—*R. Buchanan.* He thus sought to arrogate to himself a power which no created intelligence is privileged to possess. His condition of mind is the explanation of many sad and painful backslidings that followed. 2. *The system of polygamy*, which he encouraged

to an unprecedented extent, left its debasing curse on Solomon and on his family for generations (verses 1-3). The harem of an Eastern monarch is even at the present day looked upon as a sort of state necessity, and the king's rank and greatness are estimated according to its extent. He multiplies his wives according to his wealth and power, though many of them he never sees at all. Darius Codomannus is said to have taken three hundred and sixty concubines in his camp when he marched against Alexander. So Solomon, wishing to surpass all other kings in the fame of greatness, filled his harem with a thousand women. This was an enormity. In the simplest view, the sexes being nearly equal, it deprived a thousand men of wives that one man might have 999 more than he required. Such a system brought with it the inevitable evils of the oriental seraglio. Licentiousness taints the intellect, loosens the bonds of morality, and debases the whole man. 3. *The estrangement of heart from Jehovah* (verses 4-6). Solomon did not openly or wholly apostatise. He continued his attendance on the worship of Jehovah, and punctually made his offerings three times a year in the temple. But his heart was not perfect with God. Many causes had concurred to weaken the religious earnestness of his younger days—as the corrupting influence of wealth and luxury, the canker of sensualism, an increasing worldliness, leading him to adopt more and more a worldly policy, and, perhaps, a growing latitudinarianism arising from contact with all the manifold forms of human opinion (see *Speaker's Comm.*). A most significant sign of religious decay was the almost total absence of prophets during Solomon's brilliant career. The history of the prophets is the most remarkable and fascinating of any history in the Scriptures. They enter on their career as if thrust forth by some unseen hand: they utter their message as if impelled by some mysterious and irresistible force. Receiving their commission from neither king nor people, they are perfectly independent of both. No amount of violence or suffering could silence their faithful utterances, or retard the accomplishment of their mission. And when their work was done, and their testimony fearlessly borne, like flaming comets, they vanished into the space from which they seemed at first to emerge. The "conspicuous absence" of these faithful messengers indicated the mournful state of piety amid the external splendours of the empire. 4. *The public sanction and practice of idolatry* (verses 7, 8). Heathen temples were built on the southern heights of Olivet in the very sight of the Holy Temple; and from the abominable rites that were practised there, a name of infamy was given to the whole mountain. It was called—and still bears the name of—the Mount of Offence. This flagrant idolatry roused the displeasure of Jehovah; and the consequent disruption of the kingdom was plainly foretold (verses 9-13). "He thus became the author of a syncretism which sought to blend together the worship of Jehovah and the worship of idols—a syncretism which possessed fatal attractions for the Jewish nation. Finally, he appears himself to have frequented the idol-temples, and to have taken part in those fearful impurities which constituted the worst horror of the idolatrous systems, thus practically apostatising, though theoretically he never ceased to hold that Jehovah was the true God." 5. *The despotic character of his government.* Commerce, to promote the prosperity of a nation, must be national and not regal. But the commerce of Israel, in Solomon's days, was in all respects a monopoly of the crown. The excessive demands upon the people for sustaining the ever-growing magnificence of the empire became unbearable, and a spirit of discontent spread throughout the nation which ultimately broke out into open and successful rebellion. The structure of the empire was shattered by the weight of its own opulence and greatness.

II. The ultimate fate of Solomon. It was a much contested point among the Fathers of the early Church as to whether Solomon was among the saved or the lost; and both opinions were pretty equally sustained by eminent names

in theology. The question was so frequently debated, and seemed so evenly balanced, that in a series of frescoes on the walls of a celebrated church on the Continent, Solomon is represented at the General Resurrection as looking doubtfully to the right and to the left, as if uncertain in which side he would find his destined lot. We incline to the merciful view, and feel supported by two considerations:—(1). Six hundred years after Solomon had been resting in the grave, and when posterity could pronounce a calm and dispassionate verdict, Nehemiah gave a summary of the character of the great Hebrew king, in which he recognized him as "the beloved of his God" (Neh. xiii. 26, compared with 2 Sam. vii. 14). (2). Add to this the generally-admitted fact that the book of Ecclesiastes contains the utterances of Solomon at the close of his earthly career; and, in the concluding words of that book, do we not detect a wandering, sinning spirit coming to a halt, and an assured resting-place, as he exclaims:—"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments!"

III. The lessons suggested by Solomon's life. 1. *That worldly greatness has its peculiar perils.* Solomon began well. He loved God, and strove to walk in all the ways of David his father; but as he advanced in wealth, and his mind expanded into the vast fields of intellectual research, the simplicity of his trust in God was destroyed, his spiritual fervour was chilled, and religious decline began. His exalted regal position and high mental endowments raised him into a lofty region, in which few but himself could enter; and there were none round about him who had the fidelity or the courage to warn him of his danger, even if they themselves perceived that danger. He became the victim of his own imperious self-sufficiency—the weight of his own aggrandisement crushed him to the dust! Wealth, prosperity, promotion, will ever lift men into the midst of a thousand threatening dangers; and the higher the pinnacle to which they are elevated, the more imminent their peril, and the more awfully calamitous their fall. 2. *That in the greatest characters there is a mingling of good and evil.* As Bacon is, in English history, "the wisest, greatest, meanest of mankind," so is Solomon in Jewish and in sacred history. Every part of his splendour had its dark side. "The web of our life," says Shakespeare, "is of mingled yarn—bad and good together." It is important to recognize this fact in forming a just estimate of human character. Solomon is "the chief example in Sacred History of what meets us often in common history—the union of genius and crime. The record of his career sanctions our use of the intellectual power even of the weakest or the wickedest of mankind. As Solomon's fall is not overlooked in consideration of his power and glory, so neither because he fell does he cease to be called the wisest of men, nor is his wisdom shut out from the Sacred Volume."—*Stanley.* 3. *That worldly prosperity is powerless to satisfy the deepest needs of the soul.* All the great gifts of the world were possessed by Solomon in an unexampled degree. His riches were fabulous, and came from afar—the inexhaustible mines of the Eastern and Western worlds replenished his treasury with an unfailing supply. He wielded the most absolute authority. Whatever pleasure could delight the eye or gratify the taste was at his command. He was a philosopher, a poet, an accomplished scientist, and penetrated to the depths of all human wisdom—even to exhaustion and satiety. And yet there was nothing in all these to make him happy. Turning from all his former delights with unutterable surfeiting and loathing, he raises the sad, melancholy lamentation—"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" All that worldly good can do for us is—to show us its own emptiness: it raises our hopes with delusive promises, and dashes them to atoms with bitter disappointments. The flowers which it sprinkles around our path barely hide the charnel house in which our bones will soon have to rot! 4. *That the success of the work of God does not depend upon external*

display. Solomon appears upon the scene like a mighty magician who, with one stroke of his wand, calls into existence an enchanting spectacle of royal splendour—the towering palace, the shining throne, the courtly attendants in gorgeous apparel, the military with glittering weapons and prancing chargers, the exuberant riches of a prosperous commerce, and all the external evidences of a great and powerful nation—*himself* the most conspicuous figure in the gay and animated throng; and, before the eye has got well accustomed to the dazzling pageant, both magician and his marvellous creation gradually melt away into the surrounding mysteries. But, all the time, the ulterior purpose of God in raising up the Jewish nation, and through it endowing the world with unspeakable blessing, marched grandly and silently on its way. Through the changing fortunes of succeeding dynasties—through the decline and final extinction of the kingdom—through the disasters, sufferings, and desolations of the long captivities, unto the coming of the Son of God, the gracious purpose slowly ripened, and gave promise of a glorious fruitage. The moral impress on the world of the Saviour's advent was made utterly independent and in defiance of external pomp. And still the work of God goes on, often silently, often in obscurity and suffering, but always triumphantly!

High Intellectual Endowments Perilous.

I. Because they are liable to be corrupted by the seductions of sensuality (verses 1-3). Mental power is no safeguard against the grossest sins. Superior knowledge did not protect Adam from the blandishments of Eve. "If one woman undid all mankind, what marvel is it if many women undid one. To them did Solomon join in love, who can marvel if they disjoined his heart from God? Satan hath found this bait to take so well, that he never changed it since he crept into Paradise. How many have we known whose heads have been broken with their own rib?"

II. Because they may breed an undue consciousness of personal superiority. It is a lovely sight to see wisdom combined with humility, a giant intellect in union with a childlike simplicity of character. It is a thrilling but dangerous moment when the mind becomes conscious of its true power; the danger is increased when it discovers its superiority to others. The dim-sighted wanderer, stumbling with uncertain foothold on the sides of precipitous crags, is not in greater peril. A moment like that came to Mahomet, and thenceforth the noble method of moral suasion gave place to the shorter and more imperious argument of the sword. A moment like that came to Napoleon Bonaparte, and his career thenceforword was a lurid, bloody tragedy.

III. Because they are intolerant of advice and admonition. No one single mind possesses all the truth on any subject. Different shades of the same truth alter the complexion of the whole, and may influence personal action in an opposite direction. It is therefore an unspeakable advantage to be surrounded by those from whom we can take council. The wise man will learn something even from an enemy. To be impatient of advice and indifferent to warning is to be exposed to danger and disaster. It is like rushing into conflict without sword and shield; or fording the turbulent torrent, whilst despising the use of boat or raft. It is one of the misfortunes of the intellectual genius that so many regard him as above the necessity of help from others. Few have the courage to offer him advice; fewer still the fidelity to warn.

IV. Because they are apt to encourage a proud self-sufficiency. Intellectual greatness propounds to itself the sublimest tasks. It "soars into the heavens, penetrates the earth, penetrates itself, questions the past, anticipates the future,

and seeks to find in every region of the universe types and interpreters of its own deep mysteries and glorious inspirations" (Eccles. i. 13). No wonder, with such themes revolving in the mind, it should be in danger of losing its balance; and that it should proudly arrogate to itself the credit of all success and discovery. Pride of intellect is the most dangerous form of all pride. "It is a vice," says the judicious Hooker, "which cleaveth so fast unto the hearts of men, that if we were to strip ourselves of all faults, one by one, we should undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off. In the world many things are the cause of much evil; but pride of all."

> Deep is the sea and deep is hell; but pride mineth deeper:
> It is coiled as a poisonous worm about the foundations of the soul.
> If thou expose it in thy motives and track it in thy springs of thought,
> Complacent in its own detection, it will seem indignant virtue.
> Smoothly it will gratulate thy skill, O subtle anatomist of self!
> And spurns its very being, while it nestleth the deeper in thy bosom.
>
> *Tupper.*

V. Because they may disparage the deepest religious sentiments (verses 4-6). The colossal intellectualism of Solomon did not protect the purity and genuineness of the religion of his youth. His "heart was turned away, it was not perfect with the Lord his God." Not that he ceased to believe in Jehovah as the only true God: he could not so far insult and stultify his intellectual consciousness. But his religious fervour was abated, and his dearest religious convictions dishonoured. The sensual over-shadowed the intellectual; and the intellectual, thus eclipsed, depreciated the religious. And there is a school of thinkers to-day who, in their haste to reconcile difficulties, advance the theory of one theology for the intellect, and another for the feelings. Their theory is, there are two modes of apprehending and presenting truth; the one by the logical consciousness that it may be understood; the other by the intuitional consciousness that it may be felt. These two modes may often conflict, so that what is true in the one may be false in the other, reminding one of the old dictum, "What is true in religion is false in philosophy." The danger of this theory is evident in its enabling a man to profess his faith in doctrines which he does not believe. If asked, Do you believe that Christ satisfied the justice of God?—he can say Yes, for it is true to his feelings: and he can say, No, because it is false to his intellect. In all true religious experience the head and the heart are in harmony.

VI. Because they render failure the more ignominious and unbearable. The degradation of Nebuchadnezzar was all the more conspicuous because of the loftiness of his vauntings. The humiliation and suffering of the stately dames of Jerusalem were all the more noticeable in contrast with their mincing gait, their stretched-out necks, and tinkling ornaments. So the fall of Solomon was the more calamitous because of his rare and vast endowments and high exaltation. The locomotive which slips from the metals when at full speed works all the greater devastation and ruin because of the ponderous power which pulses in its capacious breast. The nature which is capable of the highest ecstasy is susceptible of the deeper woe and misery.

LESSONS:—1. *Intellectual gifts involve corresponding responsibility.* 2. *It is better to be wise than to be clever.* 3. *To be truly good is to be truly great.*

SOLOMON'S RESTORATION.

(Compared with Neh. xiii. 26).

The deep interest of biography consists in this—that it is in some measure the description to us of our own inner history. You cannot unveil the secrets of

another heart without at the same time finding something to correspond with, and perchance explain, the mysteries of your own. It is for this reason that Solomon's life is full of painful interest. Far removed as he is, in some respects, above our sympathies, in others he peculiarly commands them. He was a monarch, and none of us know the sensations which belong to Rule. He was proclaimed by God to be among the wisest of mankind, and few of us can even conceive the atmosphere in which such a gifted spirit moves, original, enquiring, comprehending, one to whom Nature has made her secret open. He lived in the infancy of the world's society, and we live in its refined and civilized manhood. And yet, when we have turned away, wearied, from all those subjects in which the mind of Solomon expatiated, and try to look inwards at the man, straightway we find ourselves at home. Just as in our own trifling, petty history, so we find in him, life with the same unabated, mysterious interest; the dust and confusion of a battle, sublime longings and low weaknesses, perplexity, struggle; and then the grave closing over all this, and leaving us to marvel in obscurity and silence over the strange destinies of man. The career of Solomon is a problem which has perplexed many, and is by no means an easy one to solve. He belongs to the peculiar class of those who begin well, and then have the brightness of their lives obscured at last. His morning sun rose beautifully, it sank in the evening, clouded, and dark with earthly exhalations, too dark to prophesy with certainty how it should rise on the morrow. Solomon's life was not what religious existence ought to be. The Life of God in the soul of man ought to be a thing of perpetual development; it ought to be more bright, and its pulsations more vigorous every year. Such certainly, at least to all appearance, Solomon's was not. It was excellence, at all events, marred with inconsistency.

I. The wanderings of an erring spirit. "Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things?" 1. This is the first point to dwell on—the wanderings of a frail and erring human spirit from the right way. 1. That which lay at the bottom of all Solomon's transgressions was his *intimate partnership with foreigners*. "Did not Solomon sin by these things?" That is, if we look to the context, marriage with foreign wives. Exclusiveness was the principle on which Judaism was built. The Israelites were not to mix with the nations, they were not to marry with them: they were not to join with them in religious fellowship or commercial partnership. And it was this principle which Solomon transgressed. He married a princess of Egypt. He connected himself with wives from idolatrous countries—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, Hittites. And then Nehemiah's argument, built on the eternal truth that friendship with the world is enmity with God, is this—"Did not Solomon sin by these things?" That Jewish law shadowed out an everlasting truth. God's people are an exclusive nation; God's Church is for ever separated from the world. When a religious person begins to feel an inclination for intimate communion with the world, and begins to break down that barrier which is the line of safety, the first step is made of a series of long, dark wanderings from God. The world changes its complexion in every age. Solomon's world was the nations of idolatry lying round Israel. Our world is not that. The sons of our world are not idolaters, they are not profligate, they are, it may be, among the most fascinating of mankind. Their society is more pleasing, more lively, more diversified in information than religious society. No marvel if a young and ardent heart feels the spell of the fascination. No wonder if it feels a relief in turning away from the dulness and the monotony of home life to the sparkling brilliancy of the world's society. No marvel if Solomon felt the superior charms of the accomplished Egyptian and the wealthy Syrian. His Jewish countrymen and countrywomen were but homely in comparison. It is almost natural, almost intelligible—a temptation which we feel ourselves every day.

The brilliant, dazzling, accomplished world—what Christian with a mind polished like Solomon's does not own its charms? And yet now, pause. Is it in wise Egypt that our highest blessedness lies? Is it in busy, restless Sidon? Is it in luxurious Moab? No. The Christian must leave the world alone. His blessedness lies in quiet work with the Israel of God. His home is in that deep, unruffled tranquillity which belongs to those who are trying to know Christ. And when a Christian will not learn this; when he will not understand that in calmness, and home, and work, and love, his soul must find its peace; when he will try keener and more exciting pleasures; when he says, I must taste what life is while I am young, its feverishness, its strange, delirious, maddening intoxication, he has just taken Solomon's first step, and he must take the whole of Solomon's after and most bitter experience along with it.

2. The second step of Solomon's wandering was the *unrestrained pursuit of pleasure*. And a man like Solomon cannot do anything by halves. What he did, he did thoroughly. No man ever more heartily and systematically gave himself up to the pursuit. If he once made up his mind that pleasure was his aim, then for pleasure he lived. There are some men who are *prudent* in their epicureanism. They put gaiety aside when they begin to get palled with it, and then return to it moderately again. Men like Solomon cannot do that. No earnest man can. No! if blessedness lies in pleasure, he will drink the cup to the dregs. We have none of the cool, cautious sipping of enjoyment here. We have none of the feeble, languid attempts to enjoy the world which make men venture ankle-deep into dissipation, and only long for courage to go a little further. It is the earnestness of an impassioned man, a man who has quitted God, and thrown himself, heart and soul, upon everything that he tries, and says he will try it fairly, and to the full. There is a moral to be learnt from the wildest worldliness. When we look on the madness of life, and are marvelling at the terrible career of dissipation, let there be no contempt felt. It is an immortal spirit marring itself. It is an infinite soul, which nothing short of the Infinite can satisfy, plunging down to ruin and disappointment. Men of pleasure! whose hearts are as capable of an eternal blessedness as a Christian's, that is the terrible meaning and moral of your dissipation. God in Christ is your only Eden, and out of Christ you can have nothing but the restlessness of Cain; you are blindly pursuing your destiny. That unquenched impetuosity within you might have led you up to God. You have chosen instead that your heart shall try to satisfy itself upon husks. 3. There was another form of Solomon's worldliness. It was not worldliness in pleasure, but *worldiness in occupation*. He had entered deeply in commercial speculations. He had alternate fears and hopes about the return of his merchant ships on their perilous three-years' voyage to India and to Spain. He had his mind occupied with plans for building. The architecture of the temple, his own palace, the forts and towns of his now magnificent empire—all this filled for a time his soul. He had begun a system of national debt and ruinous taxation. He had become a slaveholder and a despot, who was compelled to keep his people down by armed force. Much of this was not wrong; but all of it was dangerous. It is a strange thing how business dulls the sharpness of the spiritual affections. It is strange how the harass of perpetual occupation shuts God out. It is strange how much mingling with the world, politics, and those things which belong to advancing civilization, things which are very often in the way of our duty, deaden the sense of right and wrong. Let Christians be on their guard by double prayerfulness when duty makes them men of business, or calls them to posts of worldly activity. 4. It was the climax of Solomon's transgression that *he suffered the establishment of idolatry in his dominions*. There are writers who have said that in this matter Solomon was in advance of his age—enlightened beyond the narrowness of Judaism, and that this permission of idolatry was the

earliest exhibition of that spirit which in modern times we call religious toleration. But Solomon went far beyond toleration. The truth seems to be, Solomon was getting indifferent about religion. He had got into light and worldly society, and the libertinism of his associations was beginning to make its impressions upon him. He was beginning to ask, "Is not one religion as good as another, so long as each man believes his own in earnest?" He began to feel there is a great deal to be said for these different religions. After all, there is nothing certain; and why forbid men the quiet enjoyment of their own opinion? And so he became what men call liberal, and he took idolatry under his patronage. There are few signs in a soul's state more alarming than that of religious indifference—that is, the spirit of thinking all religions equally true; the real meaning of which is, that all religions are equally false.

II. Consider God's loving guidance of Solomon in all his apostacy. "There was no king like unto him who was beloved of his God." 1. In the darkest, wildest wanderings, a man to whom God has shown his love in Christ *is conscious still of the better way*. In the very gloom of his remorse, there is an instinctive turning back to God. According to Scripture phraseology, Solomon had a great heart; and therefore it was that, for such an one, the discipline which was to lead him back to God must needs be terrible. "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men." That was God's covenant, and with tremendous fidelity was it kept. You look to the life of Solomon, and there are no outward reverses there to speak of. His reign was the type of the reign of the power of peace. No war, no national disaster, interrupted the even flow of the current of his days. No loss of a child like David's, pouring cold desolation into his soul; no pestilences or famines. Prosperity and riches, and the internal development of the nation's life—that was the reign of Solomon. And yet, with all this, was Solomon happy? Has God no arrows winged in heaven for the heart, except those which come in the shape of outward calamity? Is there no way that God has of making the heart grey and old before its time, without sending bereavement, or loss, or sickness? Has the Eternal Justice no mode of withering and drying up the inner springs of happiness, while all is green, and wild, and fresh outwardly? Look to the history of Solomon for the answer. 2. One way in which his aberration from God treasured up for him chastisement was by that *weariness of existence* which breathes through the whole book of Ecclesiastes. That book bears internal evidence of having been written after repentance and victory. It is the experience of a career of pleasure, and the tone which vibrates through the whole is disgust with the world, and mankind, and life and self. I hold that book to be inspired. It is not written as a wise and calm Christian would write, but as a heart would write which was fevered with disappointment, jaded with passionate attempts in the pursuit of blessedness, and forced to God as the last resource. That saddest book in all the Bible stands before you as the beacon and the warning from a God who loves you, and would spare you bitterness if He could. Follow inclination now, put no restraint on feeling, say that there is time enough to be religious by-and-by, forget that now is the time to take Christ's yoke upon you, and learn gradually and peacefully that serene control of heart which must be learnt at last by a painful wrench—forget all that, and say that you trust in God's love and mercy to bring all right, and then that book of Ecclesiastes is your history. The penalty that you pay for a youth of pleasure is—if you have anything good in you—an old age of weariness and remorseful dissatisfaction. 3. Another part of Solomon's chastisement was *doubt*. Once more turn to the book of Ecclesiastes: "All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not." In this observe the querulous complaint of a man who has ceased

to feel that God is the Ruler of this world. A blind chance, or a dark destiny, seems to rule all earthly things. And that is the penalty of leaving God's narrow path for sin's wider and more flowery one. You lose your way, you get perplexed, doubt takes possession of your soul. And there is no suffering more severe than doubt. There is a loss of aim, and you know not what you have to live for; life has lost its meaning and its infinite significance. There is a hollowness at the heart of your existence; there is a feeling of weakness and a discontented loss of self-respect. God has hidden his face from you because you have been trying to do without Him, or to serve Him with a divided heart. 4. Lastly, we have to remark that *the love of God brought Solomon through all this to spiritual manhood.* "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." In this we have the evidence of his victory. Doubt, and imprisonment, and worldliness have passed away, and clear activity, belief, freedom, have taken their place. It was a terrible discipline, but God had made that discipline successful. Solomon struggled manfully to the end. The details of his life were dark, but the life itself was earnest; and after many a fall, repentance, with unconquerable purpose, began afresh. And so he struggled on, often baffled, often down, but never finally subdued; and still with tears and indomitable trust returning to the conflict again. And so, when we come to the end of his last earthly work, we find the sour smoke, which had so long been smouldering in his heart, and choking his existence, changed into bright, clear flame. He has found the secret out at last, and it has filled his whole soul with blessedness. God is man's happiness. "Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."

Lessons.—1. *There is a way—let us not shrink from saying it—in which sin may be made to minister to holiness.* "To whomsoever much is forgiven, the same loveth much." There was an everlasting truth in what our Messiah said to the moral Pharisees: "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Now, these are Christ's words, and we will not fear to boldly state the same truth. Past sin may be made the stepping-stone to heaven. Let a man abuse that if he will by saying: "Then it is best to sin." A man may make the doctrine absurd, even shocking, by that inference, but it is true for all that. God can take even your sin, and make it work to your soul's sanctification. He can let you down into such an abyss of self-loathing and disgust, such life weariness, and doubt, and misery, and disappointment, that if He ever raises you again by the invigorating experience of the love of Christ, you will rise stronger from your very fall. But forget not this: if ever a great sinner becomes a great saint, it will be through agonies which none but those who have sinned know. 2. I speak to those among you who know something about what the world is worth, who have tasted its fruits, and found them like the Dead Sea apples—hollowness and ashes. By those foretastes of coming misery which God has already given you, those lonely feelings of utter wretchedness and disappointment when you have returned home palled and satiated from the gaudy entertainment, and the truth has pressed itself icy cold upon your heart, "Vanity of vanities"—is this worth living for? By all that be warned. Be true to your convictions; be honest with yourselves; be manly in working out your doubts, as Solomon was. Greatness, goodness, blessedness lie not in the life that you are leading now, they lie in quite a different path; they lie in a life hid with Christ in God. 3. Learn from this subject *the covenant love of God.* There is such a thing as love which rebellion cannot weary, which ingratitude cannot cool. It is the love of God to those whom He has redeemed in Christ. "Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin? and yet there was no king like him who was beloved of his God." Let that be to us a truth not to teach carelessness, but thankfulness.—Condensed from *F. W. Robertson.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-8. We come now to that strange, dark period in Solomon's career, so strangely dark, and, in contrast with his earlier piety and glory, so deeply sad, that even the author of Chronicles passes it over in silence, and some modern critics pronounce it incredible and psychologically impossible. We find Jewish pride on the one hand, and German rationalism on the other, uniting to deny or else explain away the literal truth of the history. But there the record stands, and will stand, in unpleasant but simple naked truth, whose obvious meaning none can doubt, holding up to the world a most impressive lesson of human frailty, and showing the terrible danger to spiritual life of the vain pomp and glory of the world (1 Cor. x. 12). In the earlier part of his reign Solomon was rich towards God; but later he multiplied to himself gold and silver, horses and chariots, wives and concubines. In seeking to surpass the magnificence and glory of the kings of the nations, he fell even lower than they all; for better are they who never knew the way of truth, than he who, having been blessed with superior light from God, turns away and runs headlong into a foul idolatry. Solomon's fall was no sudden apostasy, and doubtless many a deep and wearing heart-struggle did he pass through ere the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, finally gained over him the mastery. We infer from the warnings against transgression contained in the Divine communication of chap ix. 6, that already the Lord saw in him tendencies that threatened danger; and we suppose that these tendencies grew stronger and stronger until they resulted in the dark and fatal apostasy which this chapter unfolds to us. (Compare Neh. xiii. 26).—*Whedon.*

Here we see plainly how a godly man may gradually fall into sin. He first allows himself too much liberty. He ventures into danger, and then perishes therein. He who scorns danger, who by marriage and by a wilful intrusion upon certain positions exposes himself to it, or who ever ventures in his daily course too much into the world, under the pretext of liberty; he who indulges in the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, instead of enjoying with gratitude and moderation the gifts of God, such an one becomes the slave of sin, and falls under the wrath of God. The heart is first inclined, then wanders upon evil paths, and at last does openly what is displeasing to the Lord. At first we permit in others, through complaisance, sin, which we could and should have checked, and thus we actually assist ourselves to sin. Still we preserve our appearance of wisdom and godliness, and will not have it supposed that we have entirely deserted the Lord. But he whose heart is not wholly with the Lord his God follows Him not at all; he who follows Him not wholly, follows Him not at all.

— The example given by the Bible in the case of Solomon. I. *What it teaches.* 1. That for the sinful human heart, a constant outward prosperity is allied to spiritual dangers (Matt. xvi. 26). Thus it is that trial and sorrow are often blessings for time and eternity (Heb. xii. 6-12). 2. That the most abundant knowledge, the highest education and wisdom, are no protection against moral and religious shortcomings. Wine and women make foolish the wise man. Says the proverb, no wise man commits a little folly. II. *How it warns us.* 1. To watch. If a Solomon can fall, a Solomon brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and walking in the ways of God, in old age, a Solomon the wisest man of his time, how necessary is it for us all to watch! Without watching, the greatest wisdom may become foolishness, and the highest spiritual condition may end in the wrath and judgments of God. 2. To pray. In the great prosperity and delight of this life, Solomon forgot

prayer, which he had so well practised in earlier years (chap. iii. and viii). His wives did not elevate his heart, they debased it. Prayer alone holds watch, and is therefore most necessary in prosperity and success.—*Lange.*

— The vanity and insecurity of human greatness. 1. Exemplified in all ages. 2. Should moderate human ambition. 3. Should beget a constant self-vigilance. 4. Should lead man to aim at accomplishing the highest moral good. 5. Should foster complete reliance on God.

— It is sad to turn from the contemplation of the greatness of Solomon's wisdom to the mournful reality of his end. But the thought of God flooding the soul of man must always be transcendently more grand than the life lived by man. So it was with Solomon, and so it must ever be. As perhaps chief among the causes which led to his downfall may be mentioned polygamy. Like David, he had his "burst of great heart," but, like David also, he had his "slips in sensual mire." A loose morality led to looseness in religion. The commandments of Jehovah, broken in regard to moral conduct, were also broken in regard to religious faith. Under the name of liberty, licence became the rule. The sweet grace of toleration, so invaluable a possession in itself, was profaned; and tolerant men, as they have often been before and since, were made half ashamed of a creed that could lead to such practices as Solomon encouraged. There arose two parties among his subjects—the one favouring his easy, tolerant sympathy of all religious beliefs, and only, probably, too willing to taste some of their sensuous fruits; the other keeping strong by the laws of their early religion, and resolutely opposed to innovations which they saw, under their very eyes, leading to such disastrous and ruinous consequences. The murmurs of discontent grew loud and frequent. The old tribal jealousies, which had been stilled for a time, showed that their fires were only smouldering. There were other agencies at work which helped to fan the flames of discontent. The burdens laid upon the Israelites and the taxes exacted from them were by no means light. We have seen how many of them were taken from their homes and pressed into service at the building of the temple. The obligations of the king were so great that he had to appoint officers over special districts to levy money for his use. It was often exacted in the spirit of the insolence of office. Manliness and independence could not long brook such treatment. —The absence of the prophetical order at the court of Solomon is very striking, and is, no doubt, a marked cause of his downfall. It might appear that in the person of Solomon the offices of king and prophet were fitly joined together; and so, for a time, they might have been, had Solomon only kept a perfect ideal before him. This he could not do; and neither the monarchy nor the prophetic office were at this time ripe for such a union. Only a perfect religion could produce a perfect prophet; and the monarchy was far from being in the position of producing a perfect king. As it was, the time soon arrived for the representatives of the old order to raise their voice on high. Thus arose Ahijah, Shemaiah, and Iddo, stung into speech by the conviction that the monarchy in Israel, by its narrow aims, was degenerating into an ascendency and violence which endangered the theocracy itself, and with it the sacred and inviolable basis of Israel's whole existence.—(The *Quiver* for 1875).

Verses 1, 2. This "but" is a danger-signal to warn us against— 1. Disobedience of the Divine commands. 2. Evil companionships. We are reminded of St. Paul's solemn admonition: "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. xv. 33). Solomon's intercourse with these idolatrous nations led to his adopting their corrupt worship and customs. Every true Christian must be a nonconformist: "Be not conformed to this world" (Rom. xii. 2). The service of God admits of no compromise. We cannot serve God and Mammon.

The friendship of the world is enmity against God. A distinct line of division must be drawn and maintained between the Church and the world. They are at deadly feud against each other: there can be no truce between them. "There are your foes," said a general, as he led on his men to the attack; "kill them, or they'll kill you." We must not allow our hearts to be turned away from Christ to worldliness, like Demas. The world is not to be converted by unholy alliances with the enemies of God, but is to be conquered by His Word and Spirit.

Verse 1-3. The wise fool. We have seen many strange sights in our time—many horrible sights, but none so strange, none so horrible, as that of a wise man making himself a fool. Solomon did that, and he was a wise man, even the wisest of men. If the deep sagacity of Solomon, if his keen discernment, if his strong reason, if his profound knowledge of human life and character, if even his intimate acquaintance with the law and counsels of the Lord, did not preserve his name from that stamp of foolishness which we find impressed upon so many of the great names and great acts of men, who is there that can hope to stand? Not one, as of himself, but there is without us and above us a power that can exalt even the lowly to high things, and can sustain them in all true wisdom so long as they rest upon it; instead of that, the light which shines upon their path and glorifies their way, shines out of themselves and not into them. Solomon was wise; Solomon was foolish. Strange contrast and contradiction of terms! Yet it does not astonish. It may astonish angels, but not us. We are used to this kind of experience. We see men who are foolish without being wise; but we see not one who is wise without being also foolish. Foolishness, which every man certainly has in his nature; wisdom, if he has it, is a gift bestowed on him—bestowed as freely upon him as it was upon Solomon. The wisdom does not suppress or drive out the foolishness, but is a weapon, it may be a staff, or it may be a glittering sword given into his hands to fight against it, to keep it under; a weapon to be used with daily and ever-watchful vigilance, and not to rest idly in the scabbard. This was king Solomon's fault. Having been victor in many a deadly fray, until victory became easy and habitual, he forgot that the enemy of his greatness and peace still lived—was not mortally wounded—did not even sleep. He suffered his weapon to rest until its keen edge was corroded, until it clung in rust to the scabbard, and could not be drawn forth.—*Kitto.*

— It was the charge of God to the kings of Israel that they should not multiply wives. Solomon had gone beyond the stakes of the law, and now is ready to lose himself amongst a thousand bedfellows. Whoso lays the reins on the neck of his carnal appetite, can promise where he will rest. O Solomon! where was thy wisdom, while thine affections run away with thee into so wild a voluptuousness? What boots it thee to discourse of all things, while thou misknowest thyself? The perfections of speculation do not argue the inward power of self-government; the eye may be clear, while the hand is palsied. It is not so much to be heeded how the soul is informed, as how it is disciplined: the light of knowledge doth well, but the due order of the affections doth better. Never any mere man, since the first, knew so much as Solomon; many that have known less have had more command of themselves. A competent estate well husbanded is better than a vast patrimony neglected. There can be no safety to that soul where is not a strait curb upon our desires. If our lusts be not held under as slaves, they will rule as tyrants. Had Solomon done this, delicacy and lawless greatness had not led him into these bogs of intemperance.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 3, 4. These wives and concubines were introduced to add to the

splendour and gaiety of the court. The love of display is destructive of Christian simplicity. It has ruined many by a silly desire to vie with their wealthy neighbours. 1. It has weaned mens' hearts from Christ and His people. 2. Ruined many families. 3. Swollen the list of commercial failures. 4. Drawn away its victims into wicked associations and pursuits. Fashion is the modern Moloch, whose worshippers are legion. How true is it that:

"Gold glitters most where virtue shines no more,
As stars from absent suns have leave to shine."

David, with all his faults, never tolerated idolatry during his reign; hence he is called "The man after God's own heart."

Verses 1-4. Denial of the existence of marriage as a divine ordinance is the source of the greatest and weightiest evils. Solomon sinned in this wise—that, contrary to the law, he not only took to himself many wives, but foreign—*i.e.*, heathen—wives. Not without danger is it that a man takes a wife who is not of his own religion (1 Cor. vii. 19). Lust of the eyes and the pride of life drowse the soul, and cripple the will, gradually and imperceptibly influence the heart, so that it loses all sense of holy and earnest things, and all pleasure therein, and becomes stupid and indifferent to everything divine and noble. A prince who allows himself to be advised and led by women in the affairs of his government, instead of guiding himself by the unchangeable law of God, destroys the prosperity of himself and his kingdom. Confidential intercourse and intimacy with those who know nothing of the living God and of His word, but rather resist Him—those who well know how to flatter—this is a most perilous position for a God-fearing heart (Eccles. vii. 27).—*Lange.*

Verse 1. Wasted love.—1. Love is wasted when it is placed on an unworthy object. 2. When it is not properly concentrated—a multiplicity of interests weaken its power, as the many-pointed rock breaks up the force of the wave. 3. When it is sinful in its tendency. 4. When it weans the heart from God. 5. Is supremely ridiculous and offensive in old age.

Verse 3. Woman was first given to man for a comforter, and not for a counsellor, much less for a controller and director; and, therefore, in the first sentence against men this cause is expressed—"Because thou obeyedst the voice of thy wife."

Verse 4. What sight on earth more sad than the disgraceful fall of an old man whose youth had been devout and promising and his manhood noble? Well did Solon, the Athenian, insist that no man should be counted blessed until he had nobly ended a happy, noble life.

— Solomon was the less to be excused because his soul had had so long communion with God and experience of His goodness; as also because his body was declining, so that his lust was the more monstrous, like as it is to behold green apples on a tree in winter. Augustine inveighed against those, and worthily, who consecrate the flower of their youth to the devil, and reserve for God the dregs of their old age. Solomon offended on the contrary part. Let every man look to what Lord he dedicateth both his youth and his age; for it sometimes falleth out that Satan preyeth upon those when old, whom he could not prevail with when young; and it is not for nothing that the heathen sages say that old age is to be feared as that which cometh not alone, but is itself a disease, and bringeth with it not a few diseases both of body and mind.—*Trapp.*

— Even as in youth exuberance of life and strength opens the door to temptation, so likewise does the weakness of old age; but an old grey-haired sinner is much more abominable in the sight of the Lord than a youth. The sole condition under which, amid

his natural weakness, an old man can retain his spiritual strength and guard his honour, is this—that his heart is purely fixed on God. This condition failing, let a man's whole life be influenced by the opinions of others—influenced by such opinions without sharing them, yet still without combating them, then complete wantonness will take possession of his old age. —*Lange.*

— The ways of youth are steep and slippery, wherein as it is easy to fall, so it is commonly relieved with pity; but the wanton inordinations of age are not more unseasonable than odious. Yet, behold, Solomon's younger years were studious and innocent: his overhasted age was licentious and misgoverned. If any age can secure us from the danger of a spiritual fall, it is our last; and if any man's old age might secure him, it was Solomon's, the beloved of God, the oracle, the miracle of wisdom. The blossoms of so hopeful a Spring should have yielded a goodly and pleasant fruit in the Autumn of age. Yet, behold even Solomon's old age vicious. There is no time wherein we can be safe while we carry this body of sin about us. Youth is impetuous, mid-age is stubborn, old age weak, all dangerous. Say not now—"The fury of my youthful flash is over, I shall henceforth find my heart calm and impregnable," while thou seest old Solomon doating upon his concubines, yea, upon their idolatry.—*Bp. Hall.*

— The fall of an old tree, or of some noble old ruin, is beheld with some regret, but it occasions no rending of heart. It was their doom. Age ripened them but for their fall; and we wondered more that they stood so long, than that they fell so soon. But man is expected to ripen in moral and religious strength—to harden into rock-like fixedness as his age increases. He whom we have looked up to so long, he whose words were wise as oracles, and from whose lips we had so long gathered wisdom, he who had borne noble testimonies for the truth, he who had laboured for the glory of God, who had withstood many storms of human passion and many temptations of human glory, and in whose capacious mind are garnered up the fruits of a life's knowledge and experience—for such a man to fall from his high place, fills the most firm of heart with dread, and makes the moral universe tremble. It is altogether terrible. It is a calamity to mankind; it is more than that: it is a shame, a wrong, and a dishonour. The righteous hide their heads; and the perverse exult:—hell laughs.—*Kitto.*

— **Old age.** 1. Is encumbered with many frailties. 2. Has its peculiar temptations. 3. Is not exempt from the possibility of great crimes. 4. Is often a pitiable contrast to the promise and opportunity of youth. 5. Should be rich in valuable experiences. 6. Is less excusable in yielding to the force of evil passions.

— "His heart was not perfect with the Lord." **The heart the central force of the religious life.** 1. The reason may be convinced when the heart is untouched. 2. The truth that moves us most is that which we feel. 3. The highest feeling is the highest reason. 4. If the heart is wrong towards God, all is wrong. 5. He who is unfaithful towards God, is not to be trusted by his fellow-men. 6. The outer evidence of a perfect heart is a loving, obedient life.

Verses 5-8. Although Solomon did not himself practise idolatry, he permitted and encouraged it in others; but the receiver is as bad as the thief. That is the curse resting upon sin, that the very means by which men seek to raise themselves in the world's estimation become the very means for their destruction. By perverted compliance and long toleration Solomon brought ruin and destruction upon himself and his people for centuries to come. All indulgence which is grounded upon indifference to truth, or founded upon lukewarmness, is not virtue, but a heavy sin before God, how much soever it may resemble freedom and enlightenment. In a well-ordered church and state establishment, neither

bigotry nor superstition should have equal rights with faith and truth. Where the gate is open to them, or where they are patronized instead of being resisted, then both people and kingdom are going to meet their ruin. —*Lange.*

— The evil results of an unholy alliance. 1. Idolatry was allowed. 2. It became the fashion. 3. It divided the king's heart. 4. He patronized it. 5. State provision was made for it. We learn from this history—1. Jehovah is a jealous God, and will tolerate no rivals. 2. The Divine commands are imperial, and must take precedence of all human laws. 3. The impossibility of harmonizing Christianity and heathenism. In ancient times this led to the worship of Baalim and other idols-deities, with their cruel orgies and barbarous rites. A later result has been the birth of Popery, which inculcates image cultus in defiance of the Divine commands, turns the simple spiritual worship of God into an elaborate heathenish ritual, proclaims the Pope infallible, and exalts the Virgin Mary to a higher dignity than the Saviour Himself. Religion demands decision, and admits of no compromise.

Verses 7, 8. He that built a Temple to the living God, for himself and Israel, in Zion, built a Temple to Chemosh in the Mount of Scandal, for his mistresses of Moab, in the very face of God's house. No hill about Jerusalem was free from a chapel of devils. Each of his dames had their puppets, their altars, their incense Because Solomon feeds them in their superstition, he draws the sin home to himself, and is branded for what he should have forbidden. Even our very permission appropriates crimes to us. We need no more guiltiness of any sin than our willing toleration. Who can but yearn and fear to see the woful wreck of so rich and goodly a vessel? O Solomon! wert thou not he whose younger years God honoured with a message and style of love; to whom God twice appeared, and in a gracious vision renewed the covenant of his favour; whom he singled out from all the generation of men to be the founder of that glorious temple which was no less clearly the type of heaven, than thou wert of Christ, the Son of the ever living God? Wert not thou that deep sea of wisdom, which God ordained to send forth rivers and fountains of all divine and human knowledge to all nations? Wert not thou one of those select secretaries, whose hand it pleased the Almighty to employ in three pieces of the Divine monuments of Sacred Scriptures? Which of us dares ever hope to aspire unto thy graces? Which of us can promise to secure ourselves from thy ruins? We fall, O God, we fall to the lowest hell, if thou prevent us not, if thou sustain us not!—*Bp. Hall.*

— So fallen! so lost! the light withdrawn
Which once he wore!
The glory from his gray hairs gone
For evermore!
Of all we loved and honoured, nought
Save power remains;
A fallen angel's pride of thought,
Still strong in chains.
All else is gone; from those great eyes
The soul has fled:
When faith is lost, and honour dies,
The man is dead.
Then pay the reverence of old days
To his dead fame;
Walk backward with averted gaze,
And hide the shame.—*Whittier.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 9-13.

The Divine Anger and Human Disobedience.

I. That the Divine anger is a fact. "And the Lord was angry with Solomon." It is the fashion with many to expatiate on the Divine benevolence while they ignore the Divine anger. But the fact of that anger is one of the plainest and most awful revelations of the Bible (Isa. xiii. 13; Jno. iii. 36; Rom. i. 18). Divine anger is no sudden burst of passion, no low and hateful motion of

revenge, as human anger often is, and with which too many are prone to associate their idea of the Divine anger. It is rather the deep, eternal antagonism of holiness to sin, of truth to error, of right to wrong. However much God may love the human soul as such, if that soul cleaves unto sin, it must of necessity place itself along with the sin in enmity towards God, and so be exposed to the Divine anger. It requires a sound judgment and a heart of tenderest love to speak with profit on the subject of the Divine anger.

II. That the Divine anger is excited by human disobedience. "Because his heart was turned from the Lord" (verse 9). 1. *Disobedience is aggravated when committed against definite commands.* "And had commanded him concerning this thing" (verse 10; comp. vi. 12; ix. 6). When law is violated ignorantly it is still a sin, but is not so aggravated as when committed with the full knowledge of the prohibition. Princes who have dominion over others are apt to forget the Divine dominion over them, and while they exact obedience from their own subjects, to neglect on their part to render obedience to the Great Ruler of all. The mariner who disregards the lights and landmarks which define the path of safety is the more reprehensible when he wrecks his vessel among the treacherous shoals. 2. *Disobedience is aggravated when committed notwithstanding repeated Divine manifestations.* The Lord "appeared unto him twice" (verse 9; comp. iii. 5; ix. 1, 2). Good turns aggravate unkindnesses. It is a great privilege to receive the law through the lips of God's ministers, but a greater still to hear it from the lips of God Himself. Solomon was singularly favoured with Divine blessings. His recalcitrance excited the greater displeasure, and merited the greater punishment. The Lord does not trifle with men in the declarations of His word, and He will not eventually allow men to trifle with Him.

III. That the Divine anger will manifest itself in some form of punishment (verse 11). The threat to divide the kingdom was carried out: the subsequent repentance and restoration of Solomon did not prevent it. There are some things in which repentance comes too late. Repentance does not arrest the course of physical law. It must have been a bitter experience to Solomon to know that the magnificent empire it had been his life-work to build up must ere long be rent asunder and crumble into ruins. "Solomon had let go the sincere service of God by sharing himself betwixt Him and his idols; his servant therefore shall share the kingdon with his son, and bear away the better half from him." The Divine anger is not a theological scare-crow set up to frighten timid souls, but a terrible reality, as the evil-doer will by-and-by discover to his dismay. Homer has given expression to a similar idea:—

> Fast by the threshold of Jove's court are placed
> Two casks, one stored with evil, one with good.
> To whom He gives unmixed
> The bitter cup, He makes that man a curse,
> His name becomes a byword of reproach,
> His strength is hunger-bitten, and he walks
> The blessed earth unblest, go where he may.

IV. That the Divine anger is ever tempered with mercy. 1. *Mercy in delaying punishment.* "Notwithstanding in thy day I will not do it" (verse 12). Compare a similar mitigation of punishment promised to Josiah (2 Kings xxii. 20). Delay affords space for repentance. If the opportunity it presents is despised, the punishment will be the heavier, and the sufferer be without excuse. 2. *Mercy in moderating the severity of punishment.* "Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom, but will give one tribe to thy son" (verse 13). Two tribes were really retained. The tribe of Benjamin seems to have been

absorbed into the tribe of Judah, to which David belonged (xii. 21). This second mitigation of the sentence reveals the tender compassion of God, and His unwillingness to punish. Solomon did not at once turn from God: his defection was gradual; and Jehovah did not at once wrest the kingdom from him. This additional proof of the Divine mercy must have greatly affected Solomon; and there is room to hope that it led him to repent and retrace his wanderings. Kindness succeeds where a stern severity fails. 3. *Mercy shown on account of ulterior Divine purposes.* "For David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen" (verse 13). The line of the Messiah must be preserved. The prevailing lion must come out of the tribe of Judah: not only the tribe must be preserved, but the regal line and the regal right. All this must be done for the *true David's* sake; and this was undoubtedly, observes Dr. A. Clarke, what God had in view by thus miraculously preserving the tribe of Judah and the royal line in the midst of so general a defection. As David was a type of the Messiah, so was Jerusalem a type of the true church: therefore the *old* Jerusalem must be preserved in the hands of the tribe of Judah, till the *true David* should establish the *new* Jerusalem in the same land and in the same city. And what a series of providences did it require to do all these things! The prosperous career of Solomon was only part of a great scheme for the benefit of the entire race; and the failure of even so great a man as Solomon must not be allowed to frustrate the Divine intention.

LESSONS:—1. *Man cannot sin with impunity.* 2. *The Divine anger is righteous.* 3. *The manifestation of the Divine anger is terrible.* 4. *God has more delight in showing mercy than in punishing.* 5. *He who most delights in mercy most resembles God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 9. Had not this man's delinquency been strongly marked by the Divine disapprobation, it would have had a fatal effect upon the morals of mankind. Vice is vice, no matter who commits it. And God is as much displeased with sin in Solomon as He can be with it in the most profligate, uneducated wretch. And, although God sees the same sin in precisely the same degree of moral turpitude as to the act itself, yet there may be circumstances which greatly aggravate the offence, and subject the offender to greater punishment. Solomon was wise; he knew better: his understanding showed him the vanity as well as the wickedness of idolatry. God had appeared unto him twice. The promises of God had been fulfilled to him in a most remarkable manner. All these were aggravations of Solomon's crimes, as to their demerit; for the same crime has, in every case, the same degree of moral turpitude in the sight of God; but circumstances may so aggravate as to require the offender to be more grievously punished: so the punishment may be legally increased where the crime is the same. Solomon deserved more punishment for his worship of Ashtoreth than any of the Sidonians did, though they performed precisely the same acts. The Sidonians had never known the true God: Solomon had been fully acquainted with Him.—*A. Clarke.*

Verses 9-11. **The sin of idolatry.** 1. Is a tendency of fallen humanity. 2. Is an insult to God. 3. Is a violation of the most specific prohibitions. 4. Is the cause of national disgrace and ruin.

Verses 9-13. **The punishments that fell upon Solomon show us—I.** The holiness and righteousness of God (Ps. cxlv. 17; Jer. xvii. 10; Luke xii. 47). II. His faithfulness and mercy (verses 12, 13). He knows how to punish so that His gracious promises remain firm (2 Tim. ii. 13; Rom. iii. 3). God makes known to us His

judgments through His Word, so that we may have time to repent and to turn unto Him (Ezek. xxxiii. 2). If judgment fell specially on Solomon, notwithstanding the fact that the Lord appeared unto him twice in a dream, and he was honoured with distinguished grace, what judgment must we expect, to whom He has appeared tenderly in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. i. 30; Heb. ii. 3; x. 29). God knows how, in the proper time, to belittle him who abandons and forsakes the Lord and His cause in order to become great and distinguished in the eyes of the world (Dan. iv. 34).—*Lange.*

Verses 12, 13. In the midst of the horror of this spectacle, able to affright all the sons of men, behold some glimpse of comfort. Was it of Solomon that David his father prophesied—"Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand"? If sensible grace, yet final mercy, was not taken from that beloved of God. In the hardest of this winter, the sap was gone down to the root, though it showed not in the branches. Even while Solomon removed, that word stood fast: "He shall be my son, and I will be his father." He that foresaw his sin, threatened and limited his correction (Psa. lxxxix. 31-33). Behold, the favour of God doth not depend upon Solomon's obedience. If Solomon shall suffer his faithfulness to fail towards his God, God will not requite him with the failing of his faithfulness to Solomon: if Solomon break his covenant with God, God will not break His covenant with the father of Solomon, with the son of David. He shall smart; he shall not perish. O gracious word of the God of all mercies, able to give strength to the languishing, comfort to the despairing, to the dying, life! Whatsoever we are, thou wilt be still thyself, O Holy one of Israel, true to thy covenant. The sins of thy chosen can neither frustrate thy counsel, nor outstrip thy mercies.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 13. One tribe remains to him—that is, of the Divine grace only a single part of the sovereignty over all Israel is left to him. This view is confirmed by the observation that even the standing distribution in the Old Testament of Israel into twelve tribes has its most proper ground, not in the fact that Jacob had exactly twelve sons, as after the recognition of Ephraim and Manasseh as separate tribes, the people properly formed thirteen tribes; but is to be sought in the import which this number had acquired in the remotest antiquity by the observation of the twelve months of the year, and the twelve signs of the zodiac.—*Keil.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 14-40.

The Agents of Divine Retribution.

I. Are secretly preparing when least suspected. Hadad and Rezon on the frontier, and Jeroboam under the shadow of the throne, were plotting mischief for the empire. In a time of unexampled peace and security, the seeds of rebellion were being sown. Things are not always what they seem. The loveliest flower may hide within its cup the deadliest poison. The mountain draped with richest verdure, and musical with forest songs, may simmer with internal fires which shall burst their prison, and spread devastation and woe in their burning pathway. The most promising productions of earth may be blasted in a single night. But the agents of destruction are not always in haste: they can afford to wait. Not at once does Divine retribution overtake the offender; but after much long-suffering and many opportunities for repentance.

II. Often accomplish their mission by gratifying personal revenge and ambition (verses 14-17, 25, 26). The Edomite prince, who escaped when a child, the desolating slaughter of David (2 Sam. viii.), dreamed of recovering the lost throne of his father. He dreamed of vengeance for the blood of his countrymen; and "dreams grow realities to earnest men." Rezon was influenced in all his plottings against Israel by a spirit of bitter and ungovernable hatred (verse 25), and lost no opportunity of inflicting injury on Solomon. Jeroboam, endowed with unquestioned ability, and evidently conscious of it, was eagerly ambitious of place and power. While these men pursued their several selfish ends, Jehovah used them as agents for the punishing of wrong-doing. History is full of examples of this Divine procedure. The Lord can make the wrath of men His servant, and to minister to His praise (Psalm lxxvi. 10). His hand is on all the springs of being. All the forces of the universe are His obedient instruments in scattering blessings, or in accomplishing the sterner missions of justice.

III. Embitter the close of a career which had a brilliant and promising beginning. How few can foresee the contrast which the end of life will present with its opening! How sad, how heart-rending would be the picture if we could see, as God sees, the horrid process by which the innocence of youth gives place to the hardened effrontery and guilt of old age! "Nothing but love and peace sounded in the name of Solomon; nothing else was found in his reign while he held in good terms with his God; but when once he fell foul with his Maker, all things began to be troubled. There are whips laid up against the time of Solomon's foreseen offence which are now brought forth for his correction. God would have us make account that our peace ends with our innocence. The same sin that sets debate betwixt God and us, arms the creatures against us. It were a pity we should be at any quiet, while we are fallen out with the God of peace." Solomon's reign of peace closes amid the threatenings of war, the firmness of his government is supplanted by the tremors of rebellion, his enormous supplies are failing him, his greatness is dwarfed to littleness, his wisdom is transformed into folly. Many a bitter pang smote the monarch's heart as he beheld the wreck and failure of his life. The grave holds many a human heart that has been wounded and broken by disappointed hopes, baffled endeavours, or dethroned pride.

IV. Are limited and restrained by the Divine will (verses 34, 39). The Power which has directed the migrations and limited the wars of nations, fixed the boundaries of the ocean, and adjusted the force of gravitation, also interferes in moderating and defining the degree of punishment for sin. "I will for this afflict the seed of David; *but not for ever*" (verse 39). Here breaks in another ray of promise to the House of David, whose sons, though chastened and smitten with the rod of men (2 Sam. vii. 14), were to be the human line of fathers to that Great Son who shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of whose kingdom there shall be no end. The very anger of God is more constructive than destructive. The worst enemies can do the church no damage beyond what the will of God permits.

V. Cannot be defeated in their purpose by human malice (verse 40). "Solomon thought therefore to kill Jeroboam." Murder has ever been the ghastly policy of the tyrant, the idolized weapon of the coward, the sport of the brutal, the sanguinary carnival of monsters. Solomon's relations to Jeroboam were strikingly similar to those of Saul to David. Solomon, like Saul, drew down upon himself by disobedience the anger of heaven; and to him, as to Saul, the words of the Lord announced judgments that darkened all his future. Like Saul, he knew and sought to kill his rival.

The beginning of his reign, like that of Saul's, was popular and auspicious, but its end was sad and dark. The rage of man is impotent to frustrate the ultimate designs of God.

LESSONS:—1. *The prosperous have always many enemies.* 2. *The fall of a great man involves many in his ruin.* 3. *The instruments by which a man climbs to greatness will, when abused, be his most inveterate adversaries.* 4. *Gilded sins entail dismal retributions.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 14. The certainty of punishment for sin. 1. Is here directly attributed to Jehovah. 2. May be effected by human agencies. 3. Is a warning to evil doers. 4. Vindicates the righteousness of the Divine law.

— God is said to have stirred up Solomon's adversaries, not by infusing this malice into them, but as using it to punish his wickedness by them, even as a workman worketh by tools that another made, and by crooked tools oft maketh straight and smooth work.—*Trapp.*

Verses 14-40. Solomon's enemies. 1. They are roused against him by God, so that he may know and confess what heart-suffering it brings to forsake the fear of the Lord his God (Jer. ii. 19). So marvellously does God bring it about, that he who will not fear Him must needs fear his fellow-men. Once the man of rest and the prince of peace, now he is pressed sore by enemies from the north, from the south, and from his midst. They are the scourges with which the Lord chastises him. When foes and opponents rise against thee and cause thee care and anguish, then think, the Lord has summoned them on account of thy sins and unfaithfulness. The hostility of man is a sermon of repentance from thy God to thee. 2. They were in God's hands, and could do not more than He permits. They rebelled, but they were powerless to take from Solomon the throne and kingdom during his lifetime. The Lord commands our foes, So far shalt thou go, and no further.—*Cramer.*

Verses 14-25. The power of the little to annoy the great. Solomon's last years were not suffered to pass without heavy troubles, which must have brought down his kingly pride very low. Enemies, one after another, appeared, who had in his early years been kept down by the memory of David's victories, and by the show of substantial strength which his own government presented. At length, however, they ventured to try its texture, and finding it more vulnerable than even they had suspected, that there was nothing very terrible to resolute men in its showy greatness; and having found that the king had really no power to make any effectual opposition to their assaults, far less to put them down, they were emboldened to take further measures, until some established their independence, while others offered the passive resistance of withholding their tributes—so that his power became shorn at the borders, and eventually shaken at home, where the discontinuance of many outer supplies of revenue, and probably the interruption of his various lines of trade, no longer in his undisputed possession, urged him, not to economy and retrenchment, but to make good the deficiency by the taxation of his native subjects.—*Kitto.*

— Formerly, all kings did homage to Solomon, and brought him gifts, and journeyed from all countries to see and hear him; his power was as great as his kingdom. But now his power and might are abased before those who hitherto ranked far below him, whom he had regarded as the least of his slaves and vassals. Humiliation coming through weak and inferior means is much more bitter than

the same humiliation through strong and powerful means. The latter we can ascribe to man, but in the former we must recognize the will and power of God.—*Gerhardt.*

Verses 14-22. The fate of Hadad is recounted to us not so much on his own account as on our own, in order that we may learn to regard the ways of God with man, and order our ways by Him who is ever mercy and wisdom (Ps. xxv. 10). If God brought back the heathen Hadad by mysterious ways to his native land, how much more will he lead those who keep his covenant and testimony to the true native land, and to the eternal rest, how dark and inscrutable soever may be the ways by which He leads them.—*Lange.*

Verses 21, 22. The love of fatherland. 1. Is deeply implanted in humanity. 2. Creates irrepressible yearnings in the heart of the exile. 3. Becomes intensified under a sense of oppression and wrong. 4. Fires the soul with bravery in its defence. 5. Is a faint image of the love we should feel for the heavenly fatherland—to go to heaven is to go home again.

Verse 22. The secresy of revenge. 1. The fierceness of revenge is fanned by the rehearsal of past injuries. 2. Is cherished in the midst of peace and plenty. 3. Is hidden from the dearest friend and benefactor. 4. Is intensified by its secresy.

O that the slave had forty thousand lives;
One is too poor, too weak for my revenge!
Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell!
Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne,
To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy freight,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues!—*Othello.*

Verses 23-25. Though vanquished and cast down, tyranny and ambition do not forget. They think perpetually of vengeance, and seek to satisfy it, now by rough means, now by subtle ones, whenever an opportunity offers. Therefore warns the apostle so earnestly against those secret and mighty motives in the natural heart of man (Rom. xii. 19).

Verse 26. Solomon's servant, but unthankful and disloyal, such as was Ahithophel to David, Brutus to Cæsar, Phocas to Mauritius, Frederick III.'s courtiers and creatures to him, Biron to Henry IV. of France. That king had made him of a common soldier a captain, of a captain a knight, of a knight Duke of Biron, Marshal of France, Governor of Burgundy, &c. Yet all this and more could not keep him from conspiring the death of his king, queen, and prince, that the kingdom might be transferred to others, and the Huguenots rooted out.

Verses 26-40. The dangerous glitter of a crown. 1. Infatuates the ambitious. 2. Has allured many to their ruin. 3. Hides the misery and care of the unhappy wearer. 4. Should be guarded and fenced by a strict moral obedience to the law of God (verse 38).

— The disruption of the kingdom was not the work of a day, but the growth of centuries. To the house of Joseph—that is, to Ephraim, with its adjacent tribes of Benjamin and Manasseh—had belonged, down to the time of David, all the chief rulers of Israel: Joshua, the conqueror; Deborah, the one prophetic, Gideon, the one regal, spirit of the judges; Abimelech and Saul, the first kings; Samuel, the restorer of the state after the fall of Shiloh. It was natural that, with such an inheritance of glory, Ephraim always chafed under any rival supremacy. Even against the impartial sway of its own Joshua, or of its kindred heroes, Gideon or Jephthah, its proud spirit was always in revolt, how much more when the blessing of Joseph seemed to be altogether merged in the blessing of the rival and obscure Judah; when the Lord "refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which he had loved (Psalm lxxviii. 67). All these embers of dissatisfaction,

which had well nigh burst into a general conflagration in the revolt of Sheba, were still glowing; it needed but a breath to blow it into a flame. There was one man who, by his office and character, had long ago been indicated as the natural successor of Joshua. This was Jeroboam. — *Stanley.*

— Hitherto the chief restraint upon the people had lain in the notion that the Lord had guaranteed the throne over all Israel to the house of David, and the most turbulent spirits had been kept under restraint by the fear of resisting the purposes of God. The intimation of the nomination of Jeroboam under Divine authority fell like a spark upon fuel. The important principle involved—freedom from a restriction which had become intolerable—at once raised the agent, in whose person it had been set forth, to the height of popularity among the tribes under the influence of the house of Joseph; and although he had been warned that no change was to take place until after the death of Solomon, he found himself driven, by the force of circumstances, if not by the promptings of his own ambition, into some immediate demonstrations. The movement was not attended with the result he expected, and, finding that he had become a marked man to Solomon, he deemed it prudent to evade the storm he had raised by retiring into Egypt, and there awaiting the progress of events.—*Kitto.*

Verses 26-28. God is wont to chastise the rebellion of princes against His will by means of the rebellion of their own subjects; as Solomon raised his hand against Jehovah, so did his servant Jeroboam against him. Destruction from above unites with ruin from below. Whatever Solomon undertook after his fall was deprived of God's blessing. By the building of Millo he intended still further to strengthen his dominion over all his enemies, and to render impregnable his dwelling-place; but this very building was the cause why his throne began to totter, and why he lost the greater part of his kingdom. Here applies Psalm cxxvii. 1. It was by Divine decree that Solomon himself, without his own will or knowledge, should raise from the dust to high places the very man appointed by God to abase him and to dismember his kingdom. Conspiracies and rebellions are chiefly led by those who have to complain least of injustice or oppression, but have been pampered and favoured until ambition incites them to suppress every feeling of gratitude (John xiii. 18).—*Lange.*

Verse 28. The man of industry. 1. Improves the powers he already possesses. 2. Attracts the notice of the great. 3. Is intrusted with important undertakings. 4. Acquires a position of honour and influence.

Verse 29. Here we meet with another representative of that interesting order of men—Divine messengers—who appear so often and so prominently during the time of the Hebrew monarchy. Ahijah seems to have been to Jeroboam very much what Samuel was to Saul, and Nathan was to David. He, too, probably, announced to Solomon the word of the Lord as recorded in verses 11-13. His two genuine and authentic prophecies, each of great importance to the kingdom of Israel, are recorded here, verses 29-39, and chap. xiv. 6-16. Ahijah's oracles seem like a voice from that olden, sacred past—the voice of the God of Joshua and of Eli—still proclaiming blessings on the obedient, and penal woes on them that forget His name.—*Whedon.*

Verse 30. Here we find the first instance of that mode of delivering a Divine message which became so common in later times, and which has been called "acted parable." Generally the mode was adopted upon express Divine command (see Jer. xiii. 1-11; xix. 1-10; xxvii. 2-11; Ezek. iii. 1-3; iv. 1; v. 1). In this instance we may trace a connection between the type selected and the words of the announcement to Solomon, in verses 11-13—

"I will surely *rend* the kingdom from thee"—where the kingdom is likened unto a glorious mantle upon the king's shoulders, as in 1 Sam. xv. 28.

Verse 31. All the world must confess, upon beholding the abasement of the house of David and the elevation of Jeroboam, that the Most High has power over the kingdoms of men, and bestows them on whom He will (Dan. iv. 29; 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8; Luke i. 52).

Verse 36. Even in the midst of His just anger the Lord is merciful, and the inconstancy of man can never shake His fidelity. The fulfilment of 2 Sam. vii. 14, 15, is seen in Solomon's history. The house of David remained a light for "ever," until that Son of David came who is the Light of the world, which lighteth all men who come into the world (Jno. i. 9; Rom. xv. 12).—*Lange.*

Verse 39. The severity and tenderness of God. 1. God will punish the evil-doer. 2. God will punish with awful severity. 3. God will temper justice with mercy. 4. The severity of God does not destroy His tenderness (Rom. xi. 22).

— "But not for ever." For some kings of Judah—as Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah—grew very great. But especially is this to be understood of Christ, in whom the glory was restored to David's house, such as never any mortal king had.—*Trapp.*

— In no case—not even if Jeroboam and his seed continued faithful, serving God as David had served Him—was the seed of David to be afflicted *for ever.* David had been distinctly promised that God should never fail his seed, whatever their short-comings (Psa. lxxxix. 28-37). The fulfilment of these promises was seen, partly in the providence which maintained David's family in a royal position till Zerubbabel, but mainly in the preservation of his seed to the time fixed for the coming of Christ and the birth of Christ—the Eternal King—from one of David's descendants.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse. 40. Fickle humanity. 1. Solomon at one time promotes Jeroboam to honour, at another seeks to murder him. 2. Jeroboam at one time is the faithful and diligent servant of Solomon, at another his vexatious and rebellious foe. 3. Unhappy subject whose sovereign is so fickle, unhappy sovereign whose subject is so faithless!

— From the time when they furnished to their nation the great conquering leader who settled Israel in the possession of Palestine (Num. xiii. 8), the tribe of Ephraim, already encouraged to hope for high things by the blessing of Jacob (Gen. xlviii. 17-22; xlix. 22-26), had claimed, and, in the main, enjoyed, a pre-eminence above their brethren. But the transfer of power to the rival tribe of Judah involved in the elevation of David, and the loss of *prestige* both by Shiloh and Shechem through the concentration at Jerusalem of both the temporal and the ecclesiastical, must have been bitterly felt by the Ephraimites. When David boasted that God refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, he touched a sore place in the hearts of his Ephraimite subjects. They felt themselves the "strength" of Israel, while Judah was the "lawgiver" (Ps. lx. 7; cviii. 8). The military glory of David's reign, and the splendour of his son's in its earlier portion, had prevented the discontent of the Ephraimites from gathering to a head. But as Solomon's lustre faded, as his oppression became greater and its object more selfish, and as a prospect of deliverance arose from the personal qualities of Jeroboam, the tribe, it is possible, again aspired after its old position. Jeroboam, active, energetic, and ambitious, placed himself at their head, and, encouraged by the prophet's words, commenced a rebellion (verse 26). The step proved premature. The power of Solomon was too firmly fixed to be shaken; and the hopes of the Ephraimites had to be deferred till a fitter season. *Speaker's Comm.*

— **Rebellion.** 1. Is easily fomented where conscious wrong exists. 2. Is the opportunity of the ambitious. 3. Is often ill-timed in its movements. 4. Is always attended with great risks. 5. Is powerless in frustrating Divine arrangements. 6. Is vigilant and impatient to accomplish its purpose.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 41—43.

The Death of Great Men.

I. Is not always a calamity to a nation. When the powers of a great mind are devoted to the best interests of the people irrespective of selfish and ulterior designs, and when the nation is flourishing under the sagacious and virtuous policy adopted, the death of such a character is an irreparable loss, a lamentable disaster. But a great man may be a great curse to a nation. He may be a genius in wickedness, aggrandising and indulging himself by cruel oppression and shameless fraud. The death of such a man, terrible as it may be to himself, is a blessing to the nation he has so wofully wronged. It is well for humanity that death does come to the great tyrants of society, else life on earth would become intolerable. The world would be transformed into a Gehenna of unutterable torture.

II. Is a humbling spectacle when it happens after they have outlived their reputation. Napoleon Bonaparte lamented that he did not fall at Waterloo. And it is said of Daniel O'Connell, the great and gifted Irish patriot, that he ought to have died thirty or forty years before he did, and while he stood on the highest pinnacle of fame he ever reached, after the victories he achieved on behalf of Catholic emancipation. So it might be said of Solomon that had he died immediately after the great event of his reign—the dedication of the Temple—he would have fallen in the midst of glory untarnished and of greatness unexampled, and bequeathed to history a character of wondrous moral symmetry and unrivalled reputation. But Solomon lived too fast, and, though not old, lived too long. His death, which, had it occurred years before, would have produced a profound impression and wrung the nation's heart with sorrow and wailing, was chronicled without emotion. "Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (verse 43). Death in any form is a saddening sight—in bird, or beast, or flower. Decay is a subtle, mysterious, but all-potent power, which baffles inquiry and conquers all opposition. It is heart-breaking to watch the ravages we are so powerless to arrest, The death of a good man is sad; but it is a still sadder sight to witness the death of one who once was great and noble, and has sunk into obscurity and disgrace. Oh, the weakness and vanity of man! How little is he to be trusted, how deeply to be pitied! How manifold are the changes through which he passes during the course of one brief life-time!

III. Does not hinder the progress of the Divine purpose concerning the race. The individual may prove unfaithful, God never. Great as is the power for evil of one erring spirit, the evil is circumscribed, and will not be allowed to imperil the good which God has provided for sinning humanity. "Where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound." It is humbling to observe how soon and how easily the greatest men can be dispensed with. The defection of Solomon, and of the nation he governed, did not prevent Jehovah from carrying out his merciful intention of redeeming humanity. By methods the most insignificant and unexpected He can accomplish His gracious designs.

Lessons:—1. *Death brings both great and small to one common level.* 2. *The most brilliant gifts will not protect man from committing the most ruinous follies.* 3. *Greatness is supremely contemptible when divorced from goodness.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 40. Sin obscures the soul. He who turns aside from God departs from wisdom; and let those who, instead of bowing and submitting with resignation to the chastisements of God, haughtily strive against them, contemplate the fate of Jeroboam, who doubtless stirred up the plot against Solomon, since he afterwards eagerly abetted the desertion of the ten tribes. Even as Solomon, when he sought to slay Jeroboam, must have felt that in vain he resisted the Divine decrees, and was powerless to hinder them, so likewise Jeroboam, compelled to fly to Egypt, must have become conscious that in vain he strove rashly and insolently to anticipate the execution of the Divine decrees. We must ever make bitter expiation when we haughtily resist and oppose the Lord, or when we strive to hasten His designs, or to appoint time and place for their fulfilment. The life of Solomon closes with the words—"Therefore Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam." Instead of seeking forgiveness from Him who forgiveth much, and himself granting forgiveness, he is thinking of murder and vengeance. How great and noble the contrast between this and the figure of Him who in the face of death upon the cross cried—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Let us strive to become like unto His image, and that our last thought in life may be of love and reconciliation, and not of revenge and hatred. Solomon possessed the fairest and noblest crown that mortal can wear, yet it was perishable, not enduring beyond death and the grave. The Lord promises an immortal crown to those who love and follow Him. Be faithful unto death, then He will give thee the crown of life: blessed is he who endureth unto the end.—*Roos.*

Verses 40-43. These three truths are nowhere more powerfully exemplified than in the life of Solomon. 1. What is a man profited, &c. (Matt xvi. 26). 2. Vanity of vanities (Eccles. i. 2). 3. The world passeth away (1 Jno. ii. 17).—*Langs.*

Verse 43. Solomon died in almost the flower of his age, and, it appears, unregretted. His government was no blessing to Israel, and laid, by its exactions and oppressions, the foundation of that schism which was so fatal to the unhappy people of Israel and Judah, and was the most powerful procuring cause of the miseries which have fallen upon the Jewish people from that time until now.—*A. Clarke.*

— His son followed him in the throne. Thus the graves are filling in with the generations that go off, and houses are filling in with those that are growing up. As the grave cries—Give, give; so land is never lost for want of an heir.—*M. Henry.*

— Solomon a type of Christ. 1. As the child of promise. 2. As the king of Israel, though ready to spare, yet finally executing and destroying every obstinate rebel against his government. 3. As the Prince of Peace. 4. As the builder of the Temple of the Lord. 5. As the embodiment of wisdom. 6. As attracting multitudes towards him, even of the most distinguished rank.—*Robinson.*

Reflected Rays from the Best Literary Lights on the Character and Career of Solomon.

You have seen a blight in summer. The sky is overcast, and yet there are no clouds; nothing but a dry and stifling obscuration, as if the mouth of some pestilent volcano had opened, or as if sulphur mingled with the sunbeams. "The beasts groan; the cattle are oppressed." From the trees the embryo

fruits and the remaining blossoms fall in an unnoticed shower, and the foliage curls and crumples. And whilst creation looks disconsolate, in the hedgerows the heavy moths begin to flutter, and ominous owlets cry from the ruin. Such a blight came over the Hebrew summer. By every calculation it ought to have been high noon; but the sun no longer smiled on Israel's dial. There was a dark discomfort in the air. The people murmured. The monarch wheeled along with greater pomp than ever; but the popular prince had soured into the despot, and the crown sat defiant on his moody brow; and stiff were the obeisances, heartless the hosannas, which hailed him as he passed. The ways of Zion mourned; and whilst grass was sprouting in the temple-courts, mysterious groves and impious shrines were rising everywhere; and whilst lust defiled the palace, Chemosh and Ashtoreth and other Gentile abominations defiled the Holy Land. And in the disastrous eclipse beasts of the forest crept abroad. From his lurking place in Egypt Hadad ventured out, and became a life-long torment to the God-forsaken monarch. And Rezon pounced on Damascus, and made Syria his own. And from the pagan palaces of Thebes and Memphis harsh cries were heard ever and anon, Pharaoh and Jeroboam taking counsel together, screeching forth their threatenings and hooting insults, at which Solomon could laugh no longer. For amidst all the gloom and misery a message comes from God: the kingdom is rent; and whilst Solomon's successor will only have a fag-end and a fragment, by right Divine ten tribes are handed over to a rebel and a runaway.

What led to Solomon's apostasy? And what, again, was the ulterior effect of that apostasy on himself? As to the origin of his apostasy the Word of God is explicit. He did not obey his own maxim. He ceased to rejoice with the wife of his youth; and loving many strangers, they drew his heart away from God. Luxury and sinful attachments made him an idolater, and idolatry made him yet more licentious; until in the lazy enervation and languid day-dreaming of the Sybarite, he lost the perspicacity of the sage and the prowess of the sovereign; and when he woke up from the tipsy swoon, and out of the kennel picked his tarnished diadem, he woke to find his faculties, once so clear and limpid, all perturbed, his strenuous reason paralysed, and his healthful fancy poisoned. He woke to find the world grown hollow, and himself grown old. He woke to see the sun bedarkened in Israel's sky, and a special gloom encompassing himself. He woke to recognize all round a sadder sight than winter—a blasted summer. Like a deluded Samson starting from his slumber, he sought to recall that noted wisdom which had signalized his Nazarite days; but its locks were shorn; and, cross and self-disgusted, wretched and guilty, he woke up to the discovery which awaits the sated sensualists. He found that when the beast gets the better of the man, the man is abandoned by his God. Like one who falls asleep amidst the lights and music of an orchestra, and who awakes amidst empty benches and tattered programmes—like a man who falls asleep in a flower-garden, and who opens his eyes on a bald and locust-blackened wilderness—the life, the loveliness was vanished, and all the remaining spirit of the mighty Solomon yawned forth that verdict of the tired voluptuary—"Vanity of vanities! vanity of vanities! all is vanity!"—*Dr. James Hamilton.*

Less varied and less profound is the insight afforded into the private experience of the Wise King. The insufficiency of the most perfect human wisdom to guard the heart, and of the loftiest eminence of power and earthly magnificence to satisfy its cravings, are almost painfully prominent. From amid the lustre of his throne, and the depth of an experience that had fathomed every created element of happiness, issues the plaintive voice still repeating its witness of the vanity of all human things. It is a happiness to turn from Ecclesiastes to the Song of Solomon, and, in its rich and gorgeous allegory, to read that not in vain had he searched for the secret of human

happiness, but had found it in the heavenly Bridegroom and the unutterable joys of His espoused Church. There is, however, another point of view in which this period of imperial splendour stood in very close relation to the Divine plan. For it constituted a new appeal to the consciences and even to the interests of Israel, such as they had not previously experienced. It was, indeed, the fault of their own sin, and of that alone, that they had hitherto, with the brief exception of the latter days of Joshua, tasted the bitterness of the warning, and not the glory of the promise. The alternatives presented by Moses, and again reiterated by Joshua, were two: an extraordinary blessing upon obedience, and an extraordinary curse upon disobedience. They had perversely chosen the second course, and had already experienced the first blows of the scourge, to culminate hereafter in their dispersion among all nations. But thus it happened, that of the other alternative they had enjoyed no experience up to the time of David. It might, therefore, have been open to object against God's final dealings with His chosen race, on the ground that reward had not been adequately tried. The opposition hardened by the storm would have melted, it might have been thought, amid the sunshine. Had they actually known by experience what the blessing was, who can tell what effect it may have had upon Israel? This possible objection has been foreclosed by the glory of the times of David and Solomon. During this period God, by His own gracious acts—not by virtue of any meritorious obedience of theirs—gave them the enjoyment of the blessing; not wholly, for the sinful luxury and profusion of Solomon rapidly introduced the elements of evil, but sufficiently to indicate the nature of what God had in store for them. Both alternatives were tried, and both the frown and the smile equally failed to conquer the stubbornness of their disobedience. Hence over this brief period of national magnificence and religious progress the clouds soon gathered again. Here the fortunes of the Hebrew race culminated at their highest point, and then hasted to their decline. Not that God wearied in blessing, but that Israel wearied in obeying. If neither the wise king himself, nor the people he ruled, could bear that time of glory without introducing elements of decay amid such a full flush of life, what wonder that others have proved unable to do so; and that the history of every nation under heaven has hitherto been one invariable story of growth, prosperity, corruption, decline, and ruin! Christianity has, indeed, introduced into nations a new principle of life, and extended the duration of their strength far beyond all the limits of the ancient world; but whether, even among them, the purifying salt will permanently correct the festering elements of moral corruption, is a lesson still to be learned.—*Garbett's Divine Plan of Revelation.*

Solomon's character, as drawn in the Scriptures, is surely many-sided. The simple, unpretending child—the darling of Jehovah—the chosen king—the seeker after wisdom: choosing her above all other things—the wise and sagacious judge—the powerful ruler, and glorious sovereign—surpassing, in many ways, all the kings of the nations round about him; his navies traversing many a sea, and kings and princes from afar bringing and laying at his feet their gifts: but in his old age a despot, a polygamist, and an idolater. These last were doubtless the immediate causes of his own decline, and of the subsequent misfortunes of the nation. In his reign the Israelitish monarchy reached the highest pitch of worldly splendour, the memory of which is still preserved in many an oriental legend and tradition. But that very splendour seemed to pervert the nation's heart, and cause the cloud of Jehovah's glory to depart from His people and His Holy Habitation. The outer splendour of his court and empire, the magnificence of his buildings, and his commerce with foreign nations were, perhaps, not in themselves wrong. They might have been made the means of leading other nations to the knowledge of the One True God; but they were fraught

with danger. Worldly glory has ever had the tendency to take away the heart from the pure and the good rather than to win it to the worship of God. So it was with Solomon, and so it ever has been. "How hardly shall a rich man enter the kingdom of God!" The thing is not impossible with God; but the dangers of wealth and worldly splendour far surpass their probable advantages to their possessor. And so the Church, whenever she has sought to increase her strength by a showing of worldly forces, has become shorn of her spiritual power. Viewed from the theocratic stand-point, Solomon's reign was a grand failure. It corresponded largely with the sad failure of Saul, the first king of Israel. Saul's misfortunes, however, were largely owing to his incapacity for government, as well as to moral obliquity. He was unequal to the exigencies of his age, and the task of successfully moulding into a monarchy the nation so long ruled by judges exceeded his powers. But with Solomon there was no lack of ability. His wisdom, sagacity, and power were equal to any possible emergency. But his grievous sins and neglect of God's law brought on his ruin. His greatness and glory weaned his heart from God, and his wives led him into idolatry. Speculation as to his probable repentance and final salvation is idle and fruitless, and will always be governed by preconceived opinions. The sacred writers pass it over in utter silence, and give no shadow of intimation that he ever turned from his idolatry. A mighty shadow clouds his latter days: and there, in Holy Writ, he stands depicted—one part of his life and character in strangest contrast with the other—the grandest and saddest personage of sacred history.—*Whedon.*

The danger came, and, in spite of the warning, the king fell. Before long the priests and prophets had to grieve over rival temples to Moloch, Chemosh, and Ashtoreth, forms of ritual, not idolatrous only, but cruel, dark, impure. This evil came as the penalty of another. He gave himself to "strange women." He found himself involved in a fascination that led to the worship of strange gods. The starting point and the goal are given us. We are left, from what we know otherwise, to trace the process. Something there was, perhaps, in his very "largeness of heart," so far in advance of traditional knowledge of his age, rising to higher and wider thoughts of God, which predisposed him to it. In recognising what was true in other forms of faith, he might lose his horror at what was false. With this there may have mingled political motives. He may have hoped, by a policy of toleration, to conciliate neighbouring princes, to attract a larger traffic. But probably also there was another influence less commonly taken into account. The widespread belief of the East in the magic arts of Solomon is not, it is believed, without its foundation of truth. Disasters followed before long as the natural consequence of what was politically a blunder as well as religiously a sin. The strength of the nation rested on its unity, and its unity depended on its faith. Whatever attractions the sensuous ritual which he introduced may have had for the great body of the people, the priests and Levites must have looked upon the rival worship with entire disfavour. The zeal of the prophetic order was now kindled into active opposition. The king in vain tried to check the current that was setting strong against him. The old tribal jealousies gave signs of renewed vitality. Ephraim was prepared once more to dispute the supremacy of Judah, needing special control. And with this weakness within there came attacks from without. The king, prematurely old, must have foreseen the rapid breaking up of the great monarchy to which he had succeeded. Of the inner changes of mind and heart, which ran parallel with this history, Scripture is comparatively silent. We may not enter into the things within the veil, or answer either way the doubting question—Is there any hope?—*Smith's Bible Dictionary.* (See also *Smith's Old Testament History*, p. 419-424; also *Stanley's Jewish Church*, second series, p. 256-260.)

It is extremely difficult to give a portraiture of Solomon which can harmonise at once both the demand for historic truth and the general estimation which tradition assigns to him. The story is extraordinary. David, the father of the wise king, founded and consolidated the kingdom. His life was stormy and chequered. His character was romantic, chivalric, and generous. He showed himself capable of both self-sacrifice and of revolting criminality and treachery. He was tender, and he was brave. His soul rested upon the covenant-keeping Jehovah, yet he dared to violate all the duties of the Decalogue which concern man's dealings with his brother man. Solomon did not inherit the personal traits of his father. He was not warlike; he was a man of peace. He sought wisdom, and he sought it from Jehovah He desired to administer his government according to the law and will of God. He had fine talent for observation He was a naturalist of rare attainments. He knew much of the earth; he knew much of men. He was a man of understanding, expressing his thoughts and observations in proverbs. He was splendid in his tastes. He sought wealth by commerce and by trade with heathen nations. He made Israel a kingdom of this world. At the same time he built the Temple, lavishing upon it untold sums of money, and aiming to make it, according to Eastern conceptions, splendid in all respects. Certainly at its dedication he is one of the most imposing and majestic figures in all history. But by degrees, enervated by luxury, by pleasure, by plenty, he lost the strength of his convictions. He became wise in this world. The law of Jehovah lost its hold upon his conscience. He began to justify idolatry. By degrees the splendour passed away, and darkness, and weariness, and hopelessness, and an ignoble old age came on. He forsook the noble path of his youth, and his glory was lost. The sun of his life rose in all splendour and shone brilliantly, to go down at last amid the heavy darkness of impending storm and night. The people lost their sense of the exclusive sovereignty of Jehovah; their burdens were heavy, and the brief glory of Israel as a kingdom of this world passed away for ever.—*Dr. E. Harwood* in *Lange*.

It is impossible not to perceive that such a time as this of Solomon (the dedication of the Temple), though really a great one, is a critical one for any nation. The idea of building a house which the Lord would fill with His glory was a recognition of God as eternally ruling over that people and over all people. Yet there lay close to it a tendency to make the invisible visible; they represent the holy presence as belonging to the building, instead of the building as being hallowed and glorified by the presence. There was no necessity that this evil should grow out of that good; in a very important sense one is the testimony against the other; still all experience, and none more decisively than the experience of the Israelites, prepares us to expect such a result. And here I believe is the precious moral of Solomon's history, that which makes it a perfectly harmonious history in spite of the incongruities in his own life. There was the seed of idolatry in him, as there is in every man. That early prayer for an understanding heart was the prayer against it—the prayer for an inward eye to look through the semblances of things to their reality; for a continual revelation of that which passeth show. The prayer was answered as fully as any prayer ever was. The Divine judgment, the discrimination of good and bad, came to Soloman: it was not limited in any direction; it could be exercised on persons as on things; it was shown to be the faculty which a king requires, because it is that which a man requires, since by it God perceives the thoughts and intents of the heart. But there comes a moment when the king or the man ceases to desire that the light should enter into *him*, should separate the good and the bad in *him*. There comes a time when his faculty begins to be regarded as a craft, when he half suspects that the light by which he sees is his own. Then appears the tempter. He may come in the form of an Egyptian princess, or any other; but he will in some way appeal to the senses; he will

point the road to idolatry. The secret desire of the heart, mightily resisted once, will be allowed to prevail; it will convert all that once checked it to its nourishment. The gold and the silver, not of the palace only, but of the temple—not the glory only of the kingdom, but of the sanctuary—will strengthen and deepen the falsehoods of the inner man. The glorious power of judging, which enabled one who knew not how to go out or come in, to look into the hardest cases, and to resolve them, itself receives the yoke and bows to the image; its keenness and subtilty only inventing arguments and apologies for the shame. And the sympathizing king who sent his people away with gladness of heart, sure that God was the king, and that they had a human king, who felt towards them as he felt, would gradually become a tyrant, laying on his subjects Egyptian burdens, compelling them to do the work of beasts, proving that he valued the stones, the iron, and the brass which formed the materials of God's house, above the living beings who were to draw nigh to offer their supplications in it. So the wise king may prepare his subjects for rebellion, and his kingdom for division. A lesson surely full of instruction and wisdom for all kings and all men; for those who think, and for those who act; for those who study the secrets of the human heart, and for those who investigate the meaning of nature; for those who despise the arts and wealth of the world, and for those who worship them; for those who hold strength and glory to be the Devil's, and for those who covet them and hunt after them as if they were Divine; for nations upon which God hath bestowed mechanical knowledge, and the blessed results of it; for nations which look upon human beings as only the machines and the producers of a certain amount of physical enjoyments. But though so full of instruction, it would be utterly melancholy and oppressive, seeing that it speaks of retrogression instead of progress, of folly coming forth from wisdom—death from life—if there were no sequel to the story. But the wisdom which Solomon prayed for and pursued with so great and earnest a heart was not a wisdom which could die with him, or which his forgetfulness of it could kill. "The Lord possessed me," says the writer of the Book of Proverbs, "in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up for everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was." "In the beginning was the Word," says St. John, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This is the King "who shall be found as long as the sun and moon endureth, whom all nations shall call blessed." This is that Son "who shall judge the people with righteousness and the poor with judgment." This is He in whom the prayers of David are ended. Brethren, every one of us may ask that Divine Word who is near to us and with us, for an understanding heart. Every one of us who feels that a great work is laid upon him, and that he is in the midst of a people which God hath chosen, and some of whom at least he must teach and judge, and that he is but a little child, may crave for a spirit to discern the good and the bad in himself and in all others. And if we feel, as most of us perhaps do, that we need above all things else, is that sense of responsibility, that consciousness of a calling, that feeling of feebleness which were the source of Solomon's prayer—let us ask for these gifts first. And so we shall understand more and more clearly that we are called to be kings and priests in that city which He hath set up, and in which He reigns, a city in which there is one visible temple; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it; a city into which the kings of the earth shall at last bring their glory and honour.—*F. D. Maurice.*

CHAPTER XII.

THE DISRUPTION OF THE KINGDOM.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Rehoboam went to Shechem**—Instead of remaining in *Jerusalem*, whither Israel should have come to him, as they did to David (2 Sam. v. 1), and sworn allegiance to their king. To make him king—They had no right to "make" a king, since Jehovah was the Maker of their kings, and had assigned perpetual sovereignty to David's posterity. By summoning Rehoboam to *Shechem*, Israel showed the intention to depart from loyalty to authorized usages; and in the avowal that they determined to "*make*" a king, instead of submitting homage to the rightful heir, the spirit of rebellion is plainly indicated. Verse 2. **When Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard**—Heard, not "*of it*,"—*i. e.*, the convocation at Shechem—but of Solomon's death. The *Vulgate* inserts "heard that Solomon was dead." This act of Israel in recalling a *rebel against Solomon*, and placing him at their head, shows their determination to revolt. It must be evident that they sent for Jeroboam *before* they assembled at Shechem, since it would have required considerable time for them to send, and for him to return. It was all prearranged. Accordingly, the *Sept.* and *Vulg.* add to verse 2 these words:—"He returned from Egypt and came unto his city, unto the land of Zerira, which is in the hill country of Ephraim. And they sent and called him." Verse 4. **Thy father made our yoke grievous**—In order to make his cities majestic, and to maintain the splendours of his court. But his peaceful and prosperous reign gave wealth and civic benefits to his people, which more than repaid the heavy taxation. The offence was this: Solomon laid on them a "yoke." עֹל is a yoke laid on beasts of burden, and suggests their indignation at having been compelled to do what they regarded as servile work (*comp.* Notes on xi. 27). Verse 7. **If thou wilt be a servant . . they will be thy servants for ever**—Conciliate and concede to them for "this day," thus turning aside their discontent, and they will be won to loyalty. Had he for the time become עֶבֶד of the people, he would have removed from the malcontents every pretext for revolt. But he heeded the "**young men**"—יְלָדִים—who knew his haughty and ambitious nature, and flattered him by recommending an attitude of despotic tyranny. Verse 15. **The cause was from the LORD**—*lit.*, a turn from; it was brought about by the Lord. Verse 16. *Sept.* renders the verse thus:—"*And the whole people as one man said each one to his neighbour, and all cried out, We have no part in David, nor any inheritance in the son of Jesse! Every man to thy tents, O Israel! For this man is not (fit) to be a ruler nor to be a prince.*" **Now see to thine own house, David**—*Keil* remarks that in this cry "the rooted dislike to David's royal house is strongly expressed, and we can perceive a more potent cause for the partition than the alleged oppression of Solomon." Verse 18. **Adoram, who was over the tribute**—A flagrant blunder to send this chief of the socagers (chap. iv. 6) to negotiate with them. It incensed them the more, and his fate opened the king's eyes to the furious antagonism of the tribes of Israel. Verse 20. **Made him (Jeroboam) king over all Israel**—This exasperated Rehoboam to prepare war, from which God restrained him. Verse 26. **Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David**—Recognizing the immediate peril of Israel's visits to the temple, he sought to alienate their hearts from Jehovah's worship. Verse 28. **It is too much for you**—A specious plea that it would save them the costs and toils of a long journey. **Two calves of gold**—Egyptian figures, Apis and Mnevis. These *winged bulls*, by their slight resemblance to the cherubim, might captivate their imagination and soothe their scruples. Verse 30. **The people went to Dan**—"Bethel was at the southern extremity of the kingdom, and within sight of Jerusalem; but the people preferred to turn from all associations with the city of Judah, and went to "*Dan*," on the far northern frontier. Verse 30. **Priests of the lowest of the people**—Rather, of all classes. For the Levites would not assist in his idolatry, and, moreover, Jeroboam wished to destroy all the sacred associations of Israel's former life. Verse 32. **Ordained a feast in the eighth month**—Most probably to divert the memories of the tribes from the Feast of Tabernacles, which fell on the 15th day of the seventh month, in order further to eradicate sacred memories. He had a plausible pretext for this change, in that the harvest ripened later in the northern districts. Verse 33. **He offered upon the altars**—Thus assuming to himself the functions of the high priest. Two reasons may have led to this act of usurpation: he had observed that the Egyptian king united in his person both the royal and sacerdotal offices; and he may have distrusted the prudence of vesting in a subject, at so critical an hour in Israel's career, the power which a high priest possessed over a people so controllable by religious impulses.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-24.

REVOLT: ITS CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE.

THERE is an intimate and necessary connection between sin and its punishment; and we may trace the political and moral causes of the disruption of the kingdom in the excessive luxury of Solomon and the sins of his latter days. The rebellion of the ten tribes was an event of supreme importance in its bearing on the future history of Israel. It was not a temporary division like those which occasionally took place under the Judges, but was sullenly permanent, and defied the power of all subsequent monarchs to reconcile. The breach was healed, like many other long-standing enmities, only by the fall and extinction of the contending factions. The whole history is another illustration of the cause and consequence of revolt so frequently repeated in the development of all national life.

I. That the cause of revolt is manifold, and lies far back in the history of a nation. 1. *In the existence of tribal jealousy and ambition.* The supercilious and reckless conduct of Rehoboam was not the immediate cause of rebellion. The loyalty of a people is not destroyed by a single act of imperiousness, or even wrong, on the part of the sovereign: it is a patient, long-suffering, forgiving principle; and only after long continued and exaggerated wrong does it assume an attitude of determined opposition (*vide* the Netherlands under Philip II., France and Spain under the Bourbons, England under Charles I). The answer of Rehoboam (verses 13, 14) was as a lighted match falling on a powder magazine whose stores had been accumulating for years. The supremacy of the tribes of Judah over the powerful tribe of Ephraim was a cause of perpetual jealousy and heartburning. "There was a difference in the character and pursuits of the tribes; whilst Judah was the leader and head of the theocracy and the covenant, therefore of higher religious life (Genesis xlix. 10; Psalm lx. 9; lxxviii. 67; cxiv. 1, 2), Ephraim represented the nature-side of the people's life; and the consciousness of natural material strength and earthly abundance appears with it (Genesis xlix. 22; Deuteronomy xxxiii. 13; Psalm lxxviii. 9)." So, in the moral world, there are two antagonistic forces continually warring with each other—the carnal and the spiritual, the sensuous and the supersensuous, the world-principle and the lofty moral aims of church life. But the time is coming when the strife shall end, when "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim" (Isaiah xi. 13). 2. *In oppressive exactions* The monarchy, as it grew in power and magnificence, imposed still heavier taxations upon the people, both in labour and in money. The king became a despot; and the people, who had no means of obtaining redress, groaned under ever accumulating burdens. But, all the time, the national feeling was ripening for revolt. The prophets and the chief leaders of the people saw, now that Solomon was dead, that a change must take place in the government; and they were ready to take part in the movement. The revolution might have been effected peacefully and without division; but the youthful monarch was blinded by self-confidence and flattery, and was swept away before the storm of national indignation he was too powerless to arrest. Tyranny is short-lived, and will, sooner or latter, meet with its deserved punishment. The whips and scorpions it has twisted for the chastisement of others will be used to flagellate itself. 3. *In the idolatry of king and people.* This was the head and front of offence. When Jehovah is insulted and forsaken, the way is open for every folly and enormity, and retribution will inevitably ensue. Idolatry is the germ

of many other sins. The king erred as much in the licence and sanction he gave to heathenish religions as in the severity of his imperial exactions. Sin is a great disintegrating force—it loosens the loyalty of a people, it shakes the foundations of a throne, it breaks up the cohesion of a nation.

II. That revolt is baneful in its results. 1. *It produces disunion.* The work of Saul, David, and Solomon in consolidating the kingdom—a work of time and infinite pains—was undone in a single day. Rebellion stirs up the worst passions, animosities are created which are not forgotten in a lifetime, the nearest relationships are despised, and the tenderest ties unbound. It is a political earthquake producing social disorder and confusion. The revolt of man from the authority of heaven has filled the earth with the elements of moral discord and disunion. 2. *It is attended with violence and suffering* (verse 18). On this occasion an officer of the crown was stoned to death, and the king himself obliged to fly. It is rare for a national revolution to be bloodless: thousands have fallen victims to its lawless fury. A people in rebellion is like a fierce dog unchained. "Nothing is more untractable and violent than an enraged multitude. It was time for Rehoboam to betake himself to his chariot: he saw those stones were thrown at him in his Adoram. As the messenger suffers for his master, so the master suffers in his messenger. Had Rehoboam been in Adoram's clothes, this death had been his; only flight can deliver him from those that might have been subjects." The evil consequences of rebellion are often felt for a century. The blood of rebellion makes a dark stain which it is difficult to wash out.

III. That revolt may be Divinely overruled for good (verse 24). This thing was from the Lord. Without violating the exercise of moral freedom, Jehovah used the disasters of the kingdom in carrying out His great purpose of Mercy towards the race. A word from the prophet dismissed the armies which had met to plunge into a fratricidal war; and both sides obeyed the authoritative word of the Lord. To fight against God may aggravate, but can never redress human miseries. "While the disruption of the Hebrew people into two nations was, in one point of view a chastisement upon sin, we can see from another point of view that God made this very calamity instrumental to the maintenance of Jewish isolation, and the preservation of His revealed truth. The national life was concentrated into an intenser form among the two chosen tribes than when diffused among the ten. Their circumstances, as brought into closer local proximity with the Temple of Jerusalem, and with all its services and associations, were favourable in the highest degree to the maintenance of true religion among them, and the deepening of all the ties of Jewish life. Within the narrower area the circle of idolatrous temptation was correspondingly narrowed. The very rivalry between the two kindred nations, and their common possession of the same Scriptures, drove the Jew back more intensely on his peculiar privileges, and guarded him thus from the contamination of the idolatrous apostasy established by Jeroboam. As regards the sacred writings themselves, it quickened the jealousy with which they were preserved, and has provided two independent lines of evidence instead of one; and lastly, in conjunction with these varied results, it narrowed the line of Messiah's descent, and drew into definite shape the proofs of His personal identity. The separation retarded, but did not avert, the final catastrophe."—*Garbett.* The history affords another example of how God can make the sins and follies of men subservient to His higher purposes.

ESSONS:—1. *Jehovah is the Righteous Governor of the nations.* 2. *A nation is strong only while it is faithful to Him.* 3. *It is He who redresses national wrongs while He promotes the welfare of the whole race.*

The Rending of the Kingdom.

Verses 21-25.

The thing which the prophet declared to be from the Lord was the separation of the tribes of Israel—the revolt of Jeroboam from the house of David—the establishment of a new kingdom. Yet these events, to all appearance, contradicted the very purpose for which the chosen people existed, and confused their history. And this conclusion appears to be strengthened by all subsequent experience of the effects of this revolt. Jeroboam, the author of it, is represented throughout Scripture as the man who made Israel to sin. The history of the ten tribes is a record of continually deepening degeneracy. From this time, too, all the brilliancy passes away from the house of David. His grand anticipations of what should come to pass in after times, if they had a partial accomplishment in the days of his son, seemed to be belied by the history of his son's sons. Prophets mourn over a land devoured by strangers, "whose princes were rebellious and companions of thieves, loving gifts and following after rewards; who judged not the fatherless, neither did the cause of the widow come before them." The noblest specimens of the royal race were men, the main business of whose reigns was to remove the corruptions of their predecessors. The last and most zealous of all was unable, by his reforms, to avert the downfall and captivity of his people. All these evils are evidently connected in the minds of the prophets with the schism of the tribes. They look upon their division as containing the principle, and illustrating the effects, of all divisions which should happen in all nations in times to come. Their belief that some day unity would be restored to their land is identified with the hope of peace and righteousness for the whole earth.

I. We must not suppose that the sentence which affirms that this great calamity was from the Lord is an isolated one, or that it can be explained into some general notion that all mens' doings, good or evil, may be attributed to an omnipotent ruler. We shall find presently how little that general notion accords with the language or teaching of Scripture (read chap. xi. 26-39). In this passage we are distinctly told that a prophet stirred up those thoughts in the mind of Jeroboam which led him to rise against Solomon. This prophet is not represented as a deceiver, who spoke words out of his own heart; he is a true witness for the Lord God of Israel. He announces an eternal, unchangeable law. It had been declared that idolatry must produce degradation and division in the land. The very ground of the unity of the nation had been taken away—its acknowledgment of a one Lord. What would follow if the semblance remained when the reality was gone? This would follow: a perpetual growth of internal corruption—of internal division; falsehood spreading in the vitals of the people, with nothing to remind them that it *was* falsehood, with nothing to prove that their kingdom had another foundation than that which they were trying to rest it upon. Such a state of things is inconceivable if we suppose that human beings are as much under a Divine order as natural things are. That order must vindicate itself—must show what it is: the punishment of the transgression must be the way of proclaiming the principle which has been transgressed.

II. But moral laws, though they are as powerful defenders of themselves as natural laws, do not defend themselves in the same way. Human beings, voluntary creatures, are the instruments of carrying out the one, as the hidden powers in sea, or earth, or fire, are of fulfilling the other. A personal God dealing with men will employ men as the agents and executors of His purpose.

Jeroboam has risen by his industry in the service of Solomon. He appoints the charges or burdens for the house of Joseph. He is thus acquainted with the discontents of the people; apparently he sympathises with them. The tyranny grew out of the idolatry. Though Jeroboam might not perceive the root, he could perceive the evil fruit, which deserved to be hated for its own sake; he was, therefore, qualified to execute Ahijah's prophecy, not merely as a dull instrument, but as one who had, to a certain extent, a righteous purpose. A promise is given him, not of immediate, but of ultimate, success. At the same time, it is clearly declared to him that the Divine purpose has not been altered by the sin of the Jewish king. The tribe of Judah, the house of David, the city of Jerusalem, had a sacredness attached to them which would not be lost. The tribe had been chosen, the kingdom had been established, the Temple had been built in the capital, as assurances for the past, the present, and the future, which nothing could set aside. That which seemed to destroy the harmony, even the existence, of the nation, would, in fact, bring out the secret of its harmony, the ground of its existence, more fully than they had ever been brought out yet.

III. This part of the narrative will seem mysterious and supernatural. Such assuredly it is; and it explains to us how supernatural and mysterious every event or series of events must be which concerns the life of nations and the sins of rulers and subjects. But we soon find ourselves in the region of ordinary human life. (Read chap. xii. 3-11). How rapidly the interval of three thousand years and all the difference between a small Syrian province of the old world, and a nation of Europe in the nineteenth century, seems to disappear as we read this story! Have we not, in one sphere or other, among the patriarchs of a village, or the statesmen of a kingdom, met and conversed with some of these grave old men, who did not, perhaps, set before themselves the highest standard of moral excellence, who did not at once pronounce upon the right or wrong of an action, but whom long experience had taught the might which lies in gentle words, and the real desire there is in human beings to obey, if there be but sense and somewhat of sympathy in those who rule? Have we not also—and, alas! far more frequently—encountered those young men flushed with insolence and wine, who talked loudly of putting down the pretensions of inferiors, and of maintaining their own position and dignity, who had never yet learnt in what superiority or dignity consists, who had never begun to reverence their fellow-men because they did not reverence themselves; who thought they could meet the demands of suffering and wronged men by boasting words and a frantic determination to maintain privileges which they ought never to have possessed, because they were not privileges based upon any real relations, upon any law, human or Divine, but merely upon accident or assumption, which must perish as rapidly as they have grown up. And yet these, as the story teaches, and as all subsequent history has proved, are the favourite and triumphant advisers of those whom their own vanity and folly have doomed, and who want parasites to put into words the doctrines which they have already received into their cold, empty hearts. "My father chastised you with rods; I will chastise you with scorpions." This in all ages has been the childish bluster of men who have made themselves blind to the future by refusing to use their eyes in judging of that which is before them, who fancy that the power will be their own for ever, at the very moment when the handwriting on the wall is declaring that it has been taken from them and given to another.

IV. "Wherefore," the historian goes on, "the king hearkened not unto the people. For the cause was from the Lord," &c. (verses 15-20). Here again we are on the mysterious and Divine ground; yet there is no sudden or violent

transition from that common homely earth upon which we were standing a moment ago. The prophecy of Ahijah, the Shilonite, is not brought to pass by any strange combination of events. The folly of Rehoboam and his gay counsellers, their utter incapacity for estimating their own weakness or the force of indignation and conviction in the minds of other men—these are the ways by which the Divine counsels are brought forth into act; these are the messengers of God's wrath, as much as the volcano. Deep and unfathomable mystery, worthy to be meditated on by those who are fighting with evil upon earth, and by those who have won the victory; the key to all the puzzles of history, the comfort and consolation amid the overwhelming evils which we see around us and feel within us; the deliverance at once from the debasing Pantheism which teaches that sin is only another form of righteousness—wrong only an aspect of right—and from the Manichæism which would lead us to think that evil may at last triumph, or hold a divided empire with God. The wrath of man has praised Him, and will always praise Him. Sin, and death, and hell, must do Him continual homage now, and will be led as His victims and grace His triumph when His glory is fully revealed. But neither now or then will they ever blend with His works, or be shown to have their origin in Him, or be known as anything but the contradictions of His nature.

V. Jeroboam then was established on the throne of Israel. The heir of the house of David tried to crush the revolt, and to recover the tribes; but tried in vain. The thing was from the Lord. Rehoboam could no more put down the rebellious servant of Solomon, than Saul could put down David. The decree which had said that the ten tribes should remain distinct was as Divine a decree as that which established an everlasting covenant with the man after God's own heart. And yet this is the sequel of the story (read verses 26-32). As this passage receives great light from those which precede it, so also it throws back a light upon them. We see now more clearly than ever why the separation of the kingdoms was a thing from the Lord. It asserted the real dignity of Jerusalem as the place in which it has pleased God so put his Name, not merely or chiefly as the place in which David or Solomon chanced to reign. It asserted the real unity of a nation to be not in *a* king, but in *the* King. It showed that the only basis of any political fellowship among the tribes lay in that name which was revealed to the first father of them. The revolt of Jeroboam would have done this, if he had continued faithful; his unfaithfulness discovered the same principle through another and a sterner discipline. The miseries to which it led, justified all the groans of the prophets; the light which broke through those miseries, showing the cause of them and the deliverance from them, justified all their hopes.

VI. All Christians have felt that the principle of separations and schisms in different lands and ages must be contained in this schism of the tribes. The great schism of the Latin and Greek Churches strikes the student of ecclesiastical records as a most startling contradiction in the history of a body which was to include all nations and races. Yet surely it was from the Lord. Idolatrous habits and feelings had been spreading in both divisions of the church. The sense of union in an invisible Head, though not lost, was fearfully weakened. A seeming union must have been preserved by the loss of all witness for real union; the division remains a standing witness against the possibility of a visible Head ever holding the Catholic body together. The schism of rival popes in the Western Church during the fifteenth century was as great a scandal to Christendom as can be conceived. Yet it was surely from the Lord. It led men to perceive that there was corruption in the head, and in the members of the ecclesiastical polity; it led to those disputes respecting the relative power of popes and councils which showed that neither could heal

the wounds of the Church, or preserve its unity. It led to that movement in the sixteenth century which we all believe to have been from the Lord, and which was really a declaration of faith in a living God, against a system of idolatry that was rapidly passing into a system of organized unbelief. In each of these cases there were chances of reconciliation, such as were offered to Rehoboam when the people besought him to lessen their burdens. In each case there were grave counsellors advising reconciliation, and noisy fanatics preaching uncompromising resistance. In each case the infatuation of princes and rulers, ecclesiastical and civil, was carrying out a Divine and eternal principle, even when they were defying it. They could not restore unity by declamations, by concessions, or by persecution. Facts spoke louder than the Prophet spoke to Rehoboam: "It cannot be. The thing is from the Lord."

Reflections:—Oh, brethren! how intolerable would be these facts and recollections which show every party in Church and State to have been the cause of shameful scandals, which forbid us to cast stones at others because we are in the same sin, if we might not recur again and again to the words which I have quoted so often. But if "the thing is of the Lord," there must be an end of all those strifes by which He has ordained that our idolatries against Him and cruelties to our brethren should punish themselves. There must be a day when all things in heaven and earth, which consist only by Christ, shall be gathered manifestly together in Him, when it shall be known and confessed that there is one king, one priest, one sacrifice; that we have been at war with each other because we have not done homage to that one king, drawn nigh to God through that one priest, omitted to present that one perfect sacrifice. And those who are willing before God's altar to own that their self-seeking and self-will have been rending asunder their families, the nation, the Church, the world, may hope that God's Spirit will work in them henceforth to do all such acts as shall not retard, but hasten forward, the blessed consummation for which they look. They may ask to be taught the mystery of daily self-sacrifice—how to give up their own tastes, opinions, wishes. They may ask that they may never be tempted to give up one atom of God's truth, or to dally for one moment with the falsehoods of themselves or of their brethren; because truth is the one ground of universal peace and fellowship, because falsehood and division are ever increasing and reproducing each other.—(Condensed from *F. D. Maurice*).

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-24. The rebellion and its lessons. 1. Many a base design lurks under the most specious appearances. 2. The best government will not be without factious spirits, ready to blow the coals of sedition among the populace. 3. The avarice of a kept mistress is insatiable. 4. Most men are more concerned how to save their money than their souls. 5. That government which subsists only by severity is in a tottering condition: no throne is sure where a king reigns not in the heart of his subjects. 6. They are our best friends who dissuade us from rash designs; and they are our greatest enemies who soothe our folly and flatter our pride. 7. At court, too commonly, not the profit of the kingdom, but the pleasing of the king, is the object most in view. 8. They who know the great sin of rebellion will suffer much rather than rise to vindicate themselves by so dangerous a measure. 9. When God's will contradicts our designs, we must patiently submit. 10. Love to our brethren should make us put up with many injuries, rather than seek a redress which may be ruinous to both. 11. If we

fight against God there can be no hope of success: it is wise, therefore, betimes to leave off meddling.

Verses 1-20. The departure of Israel from the House of David. I. The grievances. II. The decision. III. The rebellion.

— The division of the kingdom. I. A consequence of manifold sins—of Solomon, Jeroboam, Rehoboam. II. A Divine dispensation—for their humiliation and chastisement, and for a direction towards the heavenly eternal Kingdom.

— The sources and causes of the rebellion. I. In general estrangement from God, indifferentism, and unbelief. II. In particular—these sins on the part of the people (Prov. xiv. 34), and on the part of the princes (Prov. xx. 28). Where prince and people fear God there will be no rebellion; but where no covenant with God exists, all human considerations fall in pieces. —*Lange.*

Verse 1. It should seem to be in the course of nature that sons brought up under the nurture of wise fathers should be themselves wise. But it is not always seen, perhaps not often seen, that wise fathers have wise sons. How is this? It may be that the wisdom of the son, the formation of his character, depends more on the mother than the father, and that a wise mother is even more essential than a wise father to the formation of a wise son. We may hear of foolish sons having wise fathers, and of foolish fathers having wise sons, but rarely of a wise son having had a foolish mother. Several young men, who were associated in preparing for the Christian ministry, felt interested in ascertaining what proportion of their number had pious mothers. They were greatly surprised and delighted in finding that, out of 120 students, more than 100 had been blessed by a mother's prayers, and directed by a mother's counsels to the Saviour.—*Kitto.*

— Many a poor man hath a houseful of children by one wife, while this great king has but one son by many housefuls of wives. How often doth God deny this heritage of heirs where He gives the largest heritage of lands, and gives most of these living possessions where He gives least of the dead, that His blessings may be acknowledged free unto both, entailed upon neither. All Israel found that Solomon's wit was not propagated. Many a fool hath had a wiser son than this wisest father. Amongst many sons it is no news to find some one defective. Solomon hath but one son, and he no miracle of wisdom. God gives purposely so eminent an instance to teach men to look up to heaven both for heirs and graces.—*Bp. Hall.*

— The first step taken by the new king was a most judicious one; and we may probably trace in it the advice of those wise heads whose counsels he soon after rejected. If anything could have removed the disaffection of the Ephraimites and caused them to submit a little longer to the ascendency of Judah, it would have been the honour done to their capital by its selection to be the scene of the new monarch's coronation. Shechem (now *Nablûs*) lay on the flank of Mount Gerizim, directly opposite to Mount Ebal, in a position second to none in all Palestine. It possessed the bones of Joseph (Josh. xxiv. 32), and had been the place of general meeting in the days of Joshua (*ib.* viii. 30-35; xxiv. 1-28). Abimelech had also reigned there (Judg. ix. 1-23); and though he had destroyed the place, it had probably soon risen again, and was once more a chief city, or perhaps *the* chief city of Ephraim. There was Joseph sold by his brethren—as if the very soil had been stained with perfidiousness.

Verses 2, 3. Experience teaches that those who have once set up an opposition to legitimate authority will ever persist in their resolve, even if their design fail or is pardoned; they only await another opportunity to carry out their plans; therefore they should never be trusted.

Verse 2. Had not Israel been some-

what predisposed to a mutiny, they had never sent into Egypt for such a spokesman as Jeroboam, a fugitive, a traitor to Solomon; long had that crafty conspirator lurked in a foreign court. The alliances of princes are not ever necessary bonds of friendship; the brother-in-law of Solomon harbours this snake in his bosom, and gives that heat, which is repaid with a sting to the posterity of so near an ally. That Israel would entertain a rebel was an ill sign; worse yet, that would countenance him; worst of all, that they would employ him. Nothing doth more bewray evil intentions than the choice of vicious agents. Those that mean well will not hazard either the success or credit of their actions upon offensive instruments; none but the sluttish will wipe their faces with foul cloths. Jeroboam's head had been a fit present to have been tendered unto their new king; and now, instead thereof, they tender themselves to Jeroboam as the head of their faction.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 3, 4. Rebellious people easily seek and find in public circumstances means which they amplify and exaggerate in order to give an appearance of justice to their wickedness, and to have some pretext for their criminal designs. It is a universal fact that men exclaimed more concerning oppression than concerning godlessness and other sins; are more careful for the body than for the soul; and, so that they are free in action, give little heed to the soul's nurture (Ex. xvi. 3). A people which prescribes to its lawful sovereign the conditions of its obedience to him, and directs him how to govern, assumes to itself royal authority, and overturns the appointed order of God, thus rushing surely on to its own destruction.—*Lange.*

Verse 4. The cry of the oppressed. 1. Will one day make itself heard. 2. Will not fail to rehearse all the injuries of the past. 3. Is an appeal for justice and mercy. 4. Is not uttered in vain in the ears of the prudent ruler. 5. Cannot be disregarded with impunity.

— The complaint was probably twofold. The Israelites no doubt complained in part of the heavy weight of taxation laid upon them for the maintenance of the monarch and his court. But their chief grievance was the forced labour to which they had been subjected. Forced labour has been among the causes leading to insurrection in many ages and countries. It alienated the people of Rome from the last Tarquin; it helped to bring about the French revolution; and it was for many years one of the principal grievances of the Russian serfs. It is a reasonable conjecture that Jeroboam's position as superintendent of the forced labours of the tribe of Ephraim revealed to him the large amount of dissatisfaction which Solomon's system had produced, and that his contemplated rebellion in Solomon's reign was to have been connected with this standing grievance.—*Speaker's Comm.*

— Doubtless the crafty head of Jeroboam was in this suit which his mouth uttered in the name of Israel. Nothing could have been more subtle: it seemed a promise, but it was a threat; that which seemed a supplication was a complaint: humility was but a vail for discontentment—one hand held a paper, the other a sword. If Rehoboam yield, he blemishes his father; if he deny, he endangers his kingdom. His wilfulness shall seem worthily to abandon his sceptre, if he stick at so unreasonable a suit. Surely Israel came with a purpose to cavil; Jeroboam had secretly troubled these waters, that he might fish more gainfully.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 5. A prince who, upon his accession to the throne, requires time to decide if his rule shall be mild and merciful, or harsh and despotic, cannot have assumed his high responsible post in the fear and love of God; therefore he must expect no Divine blessing. It is well and good, indeed, in all weighty

matters, to take time for reflection, but in time of sudden danger, rapid, firm decision is equally necessary. One accustomed to walk in God's ways will at such times take no step which will afterwards cause him bitter repentance.—*Lange.*

— **The supreme value of a pause in the midst of a national crisis.** How pregnant with importance were those three days! 1. Affording opportunity for the rectifying of wrongs. 2. Deepening the gravity of the situation to the opposing factions. 3. Suspending the destiny of the nation on the next step taken. 4. Requiring the most consummate wisdom in counsel and action.

— **To hesitate in such a crisis is ruin.** Even a prompt refusal had been less dangerous than delay. But Rehoboam could not trust his own understanding. He asked three days for deliberation. Even consent after such delay would lose the generous aspect of spontaneous grace, and would have the appearance to the people of having been extorted from his fears. And it rendered refusal doubly ruinous. The indication of reluctance gave warning of the result that might be expected, and afforded time for the disaffected to mature their plans and preparations for revolt. We cannot doubt that these three days were among the busiest of Jeroboam's life.—*Kitto.*

Verses 6-11. Rehoboam holds a council. I. *With whom?* With his own servants, old and young, but not with the Lord his God and His servants. In difficult and grave matters we should not neglect to take counsel with men, but chiefly should we go to Him for counsel of whom it may be said: "He has the way of all ways, and never fails in counsel (Jas. i. 5; Isaiah xxx. 1). If He sit not in the council, in vain do young and old advise. Had Rehoboam sought light from above in those three days, and prayed as once his father did (Ch. iii. 9), or as Jeremiah (Jer. xxxii. 19), or entreated like Jehoshaphat (2 Kings iii. 11), then he would not have been like a reed shaken by the wind, but his heart would have been strong. II. *The advice given him.* Neither counsel was Divine, but both merely human (Matt. xvi. 23). The old men, out of their fear and apprehension, advised: renounce for the present thy royal prerogative, and bow before the will of the people; later thou canst act differently. This advice ran counter to his pride and despotism, so he refused the counsel of the old men. Through flattery and insolence combined, the young men counselled a course actually inhuman—to abuse his royal prerogative—to care nothing for his people and their wishes, but simply to treat them with violence. This advice suited him well, because it corresponded with his rough, harsh, selfish, and violent character. But this produced the exact reverse of what he wished and hoped. When you receive conflicting counsels from men, apply to both the test of God's Word (Psa. xix. 8; cxix. 104).—*Lange.*

Verses 6, 7. The sedate caution of age. 1. The result of manifold experience. 2. Is valuable in counsel. 3. Sees the best time to make concessions. 4. Merits respectful consideration.

Verse 6. It is the first privilege and duty of a king to seek to surround himself with men who, fearing no man, either high or low, and regardless of their own profit or advantage, shall advise him as befits men responsible before a just and holy God. One such man alone outweighs whole hosts of soldiers (Prov. xx. 28).

Verse 7. The ruler that would hold the affections of his people must first learn to be their servant. He must consult their wishes and interests so as not to seem unmindful of his most humble subject. But it is easy to see, as Bähr remarks, that such a proposition might not be very agreeable to a rash and imperious young king in whose veins Ammonite blood flowed.

— **A king who refuses to be a**

"servant of God" readily finds himself in a situation where he is compelled to be a servant of the people. The splendour of majesty is enhanced by benevolence, goodness, and mercy, but never by timid yielding and submission to the popular will.

Verses 8-11. **The reckless frivolity of youth.** 1. Is blind to surrounding dangers. 2. Is defiant of consequences. 3. Is not to be trusted in grave emergencies. 4. May goad a nation into rebellion.

— The young heads are consulted. This very change argues weakness. Some reason might be pleaded for passing from the younger council to the aged; none for the contrary. Age brings experience; and it is a shame if with the ancient be not wisdom. Youth is commonly rash, heady, insolent, ungoverned, wedded to will, led by humour, a rebel to reason, a subject to passion, fitter to execute than advise. Green wood is ever shrinking and warping, whereas the well-seasoned holds a constant firmness. Many a life, many a soul, many a flourishing state, hath been ruined by undisciplined monitors. Such were those of Rehoboam, whose great stomach tells us that this conditionating of subjects was no other than an affront to their new master, and suggests to them how unfit it is for majesty to brook so saucy a treaty; how requisite and princely to crush this presumption in the egg. There can be no good use of an indefinite profession of rigour and severity. Fear is an unsafe guardian of any state, much less of an unsettled: which was yet worse—not the sins of Israel were threatened, nor their purses—but their persons; neither had they desired a remission of justice, but of exactions; and now they hear of nothing but burdens and scourges and scorpions.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Where the counsels of the aged are rejected, be it in a kingdom or in a house, and those only of the youthful followed, there men pursue an unhallowed path. For to a true wisdom of life experience is necessary, and this youth cannot have. Those who grow up with us have, unconsciously and involuntarily, a vast influence over our modes of thought and views of life, therefore parents must have a watchful eye over the intimacies of their children.

Verses 10, 11. **A vaunting speech** is by no means a proof of courage. The more boastful a man's speech the less resolute he will be in peril and temptation; a truly strong, firm, and calm man is silent. Time serving and flattery are most dangerous for a prince; they wear the garb of fidelity and devotion, and in reality are the greatest treachery. Chiefly distrust those who counsel thee to do what gratifies thy vanity, thy selfishness, and thine own desires, and costs thee no sacrifice.—*Lange.*

Verse 11. Gesenius understands by scorpions, whips having leaden balls at the ends of their lashes with hooks projecting from them. And the latter Romans seem certainly to have called by this name a certain kind of whip or rod. Others have supposed the thorny stem of the egg plant, called from the irritating wounds which it inflicted "the scorpion plant," to be intended. But it seems best to regard the expression as a mere figure of speech.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verses 12-15. **The answer of the king to the people.** I. *It is hard*—not merely a refusal, but imperious, tyrannical, unbecoming in any sovereign, but especially one who ought to be servant of the compassionate and merciful God, with whom is great truth and loving kindness (Exod. xxxiv. 6). Authority is the handmaid of God to thee for good (Rom. xiii. 4), and not a terror. Government is not built upon whips and scourges, but upon justice, love, and confidence. That rule alone is thoroughly right where "mercy and truth are met together" (Psa. lxxxv. 11). How entirely different is David's example of sovereignty (Psa. ci).

II. *A rash and inconsiderate counsel,*

that of the young men throwing oil on the flames instead of quenching them, and exciting uproar and revolt instead of disposing to submission and obedience. Passion always blinds. When the heart is perverted the head is likewise dulled, and those who are generally shrewd become unwise and unreasonable; for it is not the head which rules the heart, but, on the contrary, the inclinations and desires of the heart are stronger than the thoughts of the head. (Prov. xv. 1; xxx. 33; Jas. i. 19, 20; Eph. v. 15-17).—*Lange.*

— The almost insane fatuity of the man who could expect any good effect from an answer like this to an aggrieved and exasperated people, whom the mere fact of Jeroboam's presence must, to an ordinary understanding, have shown to be ripe for any ulterior consequences, can scarcely be explained, but on the interpretation that the king was subjected to judicial blindness, that wisdom and common sense had been withheld from him in order that the doom which had already gone forth against the house of David might be accomplished.—*Kitto.*

Verse 14. The voice of the King of kings comes to us utterly unlike that of Rehoboam; therefore should we listen the more submissively and obediently to it. The Most High is ever at hand to change the darkest prospects of the children of men to a happy termination, and the accomplishment of His all-holy will, even as Joseph said to his brethren (Gen. l. 20). God disposes not the thoughts of man to folly and sin, but brings them to judgment by their very perverseness, and thus makes it serve to carry out His own designs.

Verse 15. "The cause was from the Lord." Better, *for it was a change from Jehovah.* The meaning is, this great change or revolution in the Hebrew state was brought about in the providence of God as a judgment on the nation for the sins of Solomon. He decreed it and foretold it by the prophet Ahijah (chap. xi. 30-33). But neither Solomon's sins nor Rehoboam's blind folly and rash imprudence were from the Lord. For them their human authors were solely responsible. But He whose Omniscience takes in all future events as foreseen certainties (not as decreed necessities) may well, in respect to events affected by human agency, determine and decree His own future judgments or mercies according to what he foresees men will freely do. So, too, in infinite holiness His determinate counsel and foreknowledge even delivers up Jesus of Nazareth to death, but this decree influences not causatively the action of those wicked hands that crucify and slay Him (Acts ii. 23).—*Whedon.*

— **The Divine purpose.** 1. Does not interfere with individual freedom of action. 2. Is accomplished by human instrumentality. 3. Is often openly and distinctly declared. 4. Is steadily prosecuted amid confusion and disaster. 5. Is ever in harmony with the best interests of mankind.

Verse 16. As is the question, so is the answer. He who makes an unprincipled speech must not wonder if he receive a like reply. The same people who once came to David and said: "See, we are thy bone and thy flesh, thou hast led us, thou shalt be our king" (2 Sam. v. 1, 2), now said: "We have no part in David; what is the shepherd's son to us?" This is the way of the multitude. To-day they cry, "Hosanna, blessed be who cometh in the name of the Lord!" Tomorrow it is, "Crucify him! we will not that he reign over us!" To-day, if fortune smile, they are fawning and bland: to-morrow, if misfortune threaten, they cry, "Look to thyself." Their cry is: "We will be free, and servants of no man"—not seeing that they are the blind tools of one or more leaders, who seek to reign over them. With the house of David, Israel flung aside the great promise (2 Sam. vii. 10-16; xxiii. 5) which depended on that house. For us has come that Son of David whose kingdom shall have no end (Luke i. 32). Let us hold stedfastly by Him, and not be led astray by the

uproar of the world—"We will have no part in Him." He will finally destroy all enemies under His feet. Thus went Israel to his tent, but not as formerly, blest by the king, and blessing him, rejoicing over the goodness of the Lord to David and to His people Israel (chap. viii. 66). He who has not a good conscience cannot return in peace.

Verse 18. The people desired freedom; but a tree of liberty watered with innocent blood can only bear poison fruit. He who asks nothing of God can only lead others to folly: he who cannot stand in the gap can never protect others. It is a judgment of God when a monarch, instead of being able to repose in the bosom of any one of his subjects, must needs fly before him to save his life. To yield to superior force is no disgrace, but shameful is the flight which is the result of arrogance and overbearing pride.

Verses 19, 20. The great majority fell away, and the small minority remained faithful: the first was ruined and had no future; from the latter came forth the One before whom every knee bowed, and whom every tongue acknowledged to be the Lord (Matt. ii. 6; Phil. ii. 11). In the Kingdom of God there is no question of majorities and minorities, but it is simply, are we steadfast and faithful unto death. The pretended deliverers of the masses well know how to manage so that they will become rulers of the people: they allow themselves to be summoned, and apparently persuaded, to the very object which was the sole aim of their efforts.—*Lange.*

Verse 19. Sin a revolt. 1. Against God. 2. Has introduced anarchy and disorder in the moral world. 3. Will be subdued by the triumph of moral goodness.

Verse 20. Blessed be God for lawful government; even a mutinous body cannot want a head. If the rebellious Israelities have cast off their true sovereign, they must choose a false. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, must be the man. He had need be skilful and sit sure that shall back the horse which hath cast his rider. Israel could not have anywhere met with more craft and courage than they found in this leader. Rehoboam returns to Jerusalem lighter by a crown than he went forth: Judah and Benjamin still stick fast to their loyalty. God will ever reserve a remnant free from the common contagion.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 21-24. The authority of the Divine Word. 1. Is superior to the power of the sword and of the throne. 2. Is sufficient to prevent the most terrible wars. 3. Should be acknowledged by all nations. 4. Will disconcert the cleverest plottings of the wicked.

Verse 21. What Rehoboam had lost through insolence and weakness, through wickedness and folly, he now sought to regain by violence and battle: instead of humbling himself before the All-powerful hand of God, he is haughty, and depends upon his own arm of flesh. The natural heart of man is a froward and timorous thing (Jer. xvii. 9), without safe resting place or firm support, now buoyed up, now cast down, the football of every storm of fortune. But blessed is the man whose trust and confidence are in the Lord. In the renewed heart is no pride and no fear.

Verses 22-24. The Word of the Lord to the king and to the host. I. The command—Ye shall not go up, nor fight. II. The cause of the commandment—For this thing is from me. III. The obedience to the command—They hearkened. Civil wars are the most unnatural and likewise the fiercest and bitterest. He who stirs up strife between brethren commits a crime which never goes unpunished.

— Shemaiah, a type of the Lord's servants. 1. He is a man of God, and as such he brings good tidings of peace (Isa. lii. 7). 2. He has no other arms than the sword of the

Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. vi. 17). 3. With His word he comes, strong and fearless, before the king and his whole host (Acts iv. 20; ix. 15).

— With this man of God we have met for the first time, and though our knowledge of him is limited to a few scattered notices, we see in them how vast a moral power the prophets of this age wielded over the king and the nation. They, and the converts of their ministry, were the salt that preserved the nation through many a long year of idolatrous rebellion. Shemaiah seems to have been, during Rehoboam's reign, pre-eminently the prophet of Judah. His word on this occasion, though doubtless much against the royal will, awed the king into submission. Again, in the time of Shishak's invasion, he appeared, and his ministry was instrumental in averting the possible consequences of that invasion—the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Chron. xii. 5-7).—*Whedon.*

— We see here with what great might the God of truth maintains His word. By the prophet Ahijah He announced to Jeroboam that he should rule over ten tribes of Israel: that is accomplished here. He had promised to leave one tribe to the house of David: that is accomplished here. He promised to Ephraim, or to his father Joseph, that kings should proceed from them (Gen. xlix.; Deut. xxxiii.), and that is fulfilled here, since Jeroboam becomes king through Ephraim. Thus nothing remains unfulfilled of all that God has spoken, promised, or threatened. Solomon and Rehoboam strove to prevent the fulfilment of God's word in Jeroboam, for which purpose Solomon planned to kill Jeroboam, and Rehoboam assembled a great army against him; but all in vain. Therefore let all men believe and seek after the Word of God, and not strive to resist it (Luke xxi. 33).—*Wurt. Summ.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 25—33.

A Man-made Religion.

The genius of Jeroboam was equal to every emergency. He was in his element when fomenting rebellion. He was equally at home as ruler of the newly-formed state, and adopted prompt and vigorous measures for the establishment of his kingdom. He soon saw that his authority would be weakened if provision was not made for the religious instincts of his people. And here we get a glimpse at the bold, reckless daring of the man's nature. He quails not before the demand made upon him, but at once constructs a religion which was intended to serve his own crafty purposes, rather than to promote the piety of the people and the glory of God. In the system of worship thus established we have *the leading characteristics of a man-made religion.*

I. It is regarded as a necessary element in state-craft (verses 25, 27). It may be that Jeroboam neither wished nor designed to introduce heathenish idolatry into his kingdom; the revolt by which he had reached the throne was brought about as the result of, and as a protest against, the abominations of such idolatry. He was apprehensive that if all his people went up to Jerusalem to worship, their hearts would be weaned from him and won over to the government of Rehoboam. He therefore instituted a new system of worship, not, perhaps, with the intention of countenancing idolatry, although in reality caring little about the result, but as a modification of the true worship of God demanded by the changed circumstances of the kingdom. His religious reform was dictated by a shrewd state-policy, not by the Word of God. There is a class of politicians who regard religion as an erratic and troublesome superstition, but a necessary part of state organization; and who maintain that the

religion of a people is determined by the condition of their national life. Now this is inverting the order of things, as if a pyramid was intended to rest upon its apex rather than its base, or a tree to produce fruit by stretching its branches underground and its roots in the upper air. The fact is, religion is the mightiest force in a nation, and that which determines the conditions and development of national life. The government that trifles with the religion of a people cannot be permanent.

II. It is the suggestion of an unbelieving and wicked heart. The king took counsel (verse 28), not with God, but with his own wicked heart (verse 33), and with those whom he knew would support and carry out his views. Had Jeroboam believed in God, and been obedient to His commandments, his kingdom would have been established as David's (chap. xi. 38). But when God is ignored, the unbeliever is left to his own devices; and there is no possible folly and wickedness to which he may not have recourse. The infamy that Jeroboam heaped upon his name is a terrible example to all who would set up a religion irrespective of the Divine word and sanction. What is religion without faith, and what scope is there for faith in a religion in which the originator himself has no faith? Vain, empty, sinful man is in too sore need of supernatural help and grace to find either comfort or elevation in a religion that springs only from himself!

III. It is essentially idolatrous (verses 28-30). 1. *It is thus a violation of a specific Divine commandment* (Exodus xx. 4). The breaking of one commandment leads the way to the breaking of others. It is like the letting out of waters: the wider the breach, the more impetuous and overwhelming the deluge. A single fault in the foundation imperils the whole structure. Whatever is based on wrong-doing is unstable and perishable. 2. *Its tendency is thus to insult and supplant the One True God* (verse 28). These calves were not set up to be worshipped as idols, any more than were the ark and cherubim, and other sacred shrines at Jerusalem, but were designed to be symbols of Jehovah. And yet the inevitable tendency was to lose sight of the invisible in the visible, as the subsequent history of Israel so painfully proved. What an enormity is it to liken the glory of the invisible God to an ox that eateth grass! Man creates his own idols, and falls down and worships them. Any creature, real or imaginary, which we invest with Divine properties is an idol; or, it may be the true God falsely conceived. Idolatry is a sin against which the most faithful warnings have been uttered in all ages, and on account of which the severest judgments have been inflicted; yet it is that to which humanity is most prone. 3. *It is thus the occasion of great moral corruption.* "And this thing became a sin" (verse 30). It was not without reason that the Israelitish king was branded in sacred history as "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." That sin consisted in a one-sided construction and use of the facts of sacred history, and an arrogant assumption to improve the religious worship of the nation by most dangerous methods that had no proper sanction from Jehovah or His prophets. He may be regarded as a type of the Roman hierarchy, which, in its efforts to bind the people to St. Peter's chair, has verily set up graven images in connection with its worship, and, assuming to represent the sanctities of a holy antiquity, has, in fact, reproduced the forms of heathen idolatry. Idolatry is the fruitful source of many other sins.

IV. It is not scrupulous as to the agents it employs (verse 31). Not that the king selected priests from persons of low birth or infamous character. This would have brought his system of worship into contempt. The priesthood had hitherto been hereditary and confined to the tribe of Levi. But it is probable that the Levites opposed the unauthorised innovations, and refused to give

their sanction to the new religion; indeed, they left their possessions and came to Jerusalem, where they found a more congenial sphere for their sacred functions (2 Chron. xi. 13-17). But, not to be foiled in his purpose, Jeroboam created a new priestly order, taken indiscriminately from the entire population, irrespective of rank or tribes. The wily schemer never lacks instruments to work out his designs.

V. It has all the outward seeming of a genuine institution (verse 32, 33). There was the Temple, the feast of dedication, the altar, the sacrifice, the priests. Nothing is more delusive than religious form and ceremony. There may be the most elaborate ritual, while the spirit of religion is extinct. The most gorgeous tapestry may hide a wall honey-combed with decay.

LESSONS:—1. *A Man-Made Religion is deficient in fundamental truth.* 2. *In spiritual life.* 3. *In authority.* 4. *In practical morality.* 5. *In saving efficacy.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 25-33. The demoralizing influence of idolatry on national life. 1. It leads to a national enfeeblement, against which the strongest fortresses afford no protection (verse 25). 2. It distorts the idea of God (verse 28). 3. It loosens the bonds of morality (verse 30). 4. It leaves the people an easy prey in the hands of a selfish and unscrupulous ruler. 5. It caricatures the solemnities of worship (verses 31-33). 6. It issues in national extinction.

Verse 25. Shechem had been ruined and sowed with salt (Judges ix. 45), it had been rebuilt (1 Kings xii. 1), but now made a royal city, as being *in meditullio regni*, in the middle of the kingdom: as Constantinople, for its situation, is said to be a city fatally founded, to command a great part of the world.—*Trapp.*

— As soon as Jeroboam obtained the wish of his heart, namely, the rulership, he asked no longer about the condition under which it was promised to him, and with which it was bound up (chap. xi. 38). How often we forget, when God has granted to us the desire of our hearts, to walk in His ways. He who obtains rulership by the path of rebellion, must always be in fear and anxiety lest he lose it again in the same way, for the populace which to-day cries, Hosanna! will on the morrow shout, Crucify! crucify!

An evil conscience makes the most stout hearted and the strongest timid and anxious, so that he sees dangers where there are none, and then, to insure his own safety, devises wrong and evil instruments. One false step always requires another.—*Lange.*

— Humanly speaking, Jeroboam's fear was, it must be confessed, well-founded. We cannot, therefore, be surprised that he gave way to the temptation of helping forward the plans of Providence by the crooked devices of a merely human policy. His measures for counteracting the tendency to reunion with Judah were cleverly devised, and proved him "wise in his generation." The later history shows that they were effectual. Like all measures which involve a dereliction of principle, they brought certain evils in their train; and they drew down a Divine judgment on himself which he had not faith enough to anticipate. But they fully secured the object at which he aimed. They prevented all healing of the breach between the two kingdoms. They made the separation final. They produced the result that not only no reunion took place, but no symptoms of an inclination to re-unite ever manifested themselves during the whole period of the double kingdom.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verses 28-33. The sin of Jeroboam

wherewith he caused Israel to sin. I. He erected images of God against the supreme commandment of God (Exod. xx. 4). II. He set aside the prescribed order of the servants of God, and made his own priests. III. He altered the feast, which was a reminder of the great deeds of God, and made it a mere nature-and-harvest feast. That is the greatest tyranny when the ruler of a land makes himself the master also of the faith and conscience of his subjects.

— In the estimation of the people of the world this policy of Jeroboam is held to be proper, because they consider that religion is to be established, held, and altered as may be useful and good for the land and the people and the common interest, and that the regimen is not for the sake of the religion, but the religion for the regimen. Consequently Jeroboam acted well and wisely in the matter. But God says, on the other hand, all that I command you, that shall ye observe, ye shall not add thereto (Deut. xii. 32). For godliness is not to be regulated by the common weal, but the common weal is to be regulated by godliness. Every government which employs religious instrumentalities, and interferes with the faith of the people, not for the sake of God and the salvation of souls, but for the attainment of political ends, shares the guilt of the sin of Jeroboam, and involves itself in heavy responsibilities.—*Cramer.*

Verse 28. "Whereupon the king took counsel." Compared with verse 26—"And Jeroboam said in his heart." The mental toils of the cunning. 1. A wicked, crooked policy involves far more anxiety and labour than a straightforward policy. 2. The sinful plotter is in a perpetual fever of fear—he is in antagonism with both God and man. 3. Many of the schemes of the cunning are too diabolical to be divulged; they must be hidden within one solitary breast. What a horrible picture is presented by such a mind to the eye of the Omniscient! 4. A temporary success intensifies the mental pressure. 5. The most complicated contrivances of the cunning end in humiliating defeat.

— He invented a political religion, instituted feasts in his own times different from those appointed by the Lord, gave the people certain objects of devotion, and pretended to think it would be more inconvenient and oppressive to them to have to go up to Jerusalem to worship. This was not the last time that religion was made a state engine to serve political purposes. It is strange that in pointing out his calves to the people he should use the same words that Aaron used when he made the golden calf in the wilderness, when they must have heard what terrible judgments fell upon their forefathers for this idolatry.

— Oh, the mischief that comes of wicked infidelity! It was God's prophet that had rent Jeroboam's garment into twelve pieces, and had given ten of them to him, in token of his sharing the ten tribes; who, in the same breath, also told him that the cause of this distraction was their idolatry. Yet now will he institute an idolatrous service for the holding together of them whom their idolatry had rent from their true sovereign to him. He says not, God hath promised me this kingdom; God hath conferred it; God shall find means to maintain his own act; I will obey Him, let Him dispose of me. The God of Israel is wise and powerful enough to fetch about his own designs; but, as if the devices of men were stronger than God's providence and ordination, he will be working out his own ends by profane policies. Jeroboam, being born an Israelite, and bred in the court of a Solomon, could not but know the express charge of God against the making of images, against the erection of any rival altars to that of Jerusalem; yet now that he sees both these may avail much to the advancing of his ambitious project, he sets up those images, those altars. Wicked men care not to make bold with God in cases of their own commodity. If the laws of their Maker lie in the way of their profit or promotion, they either spurn them out or tread upon them at pleasure. Aspiring

minds will know no God but honour. Israel sojourned in Egypt, and brought home a golden calf; Jeroboam sojourns there, and brought home two. It is hard to dwell in Egypt untainted. Not to savour of the sins of the place we live in is no less strange than for wholesome liquor tunned up in a musty vessel not to smell of the cask. The best body may be infected in a contagious air. Let him beware of Egypt that would be free from idolatry.—*Bp. Hall.*

— To the perverted man, what he shall do for his God is forthwith too much. In matters of faith and of the homage due to God, we should not consider what is convenient and agreeable to the great mass, but should enquire only for what God prescribes in His Word. He who conciliates the sensuousness and the untutored ways of the masses, and flatters their unbelief or their superstition, belongs to the false prophets who make broad the way of life. Doctrines and institutions which depart from the revealed Word of God are often praised as progress and seasonable reforms, while in truth they are steps backward and corrupting innovations. In Christendom we pray no longer to wood and stone, and to golden calves, and think ourselves thereby raised far above a darkened heathenism, but, nevertheless, we often place the creature above the Creator, and abandon ourselves to it with all our love, and consideration, and service. Behold the things and persons thou lovest with thy whole heart and strength, these are thy gods. What use of typical representations in the worship of God is permitted, and what is forbidden ?—*Calwer.*

Verse 30. Idolatry a sin. 1. It is a violation of the Divine commandment (Ex. xx. 4). 2. It ignores the claims of the Most High. 3. It is degrading to the votary. 4. It is pernicious in its example to others. 5. They who think to secure their safety by sin only hasten the ruin they would avoid.

— As a great tree in a forest, when it falls drags down many others with it, so also are many others carried along by the bad example of those who rule when they fall away from their religion, or sin otherwise grossly against God.—*Starke.*

— Every accessory to sin is filthy, but the first authors of sin are abominable. How is Jeroboam branded in every of these sacred leaves. How do all ages ring of his fact with the accent of dishonour and indignation. "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that made Israel to sin." It was a shame for Israel that it could be made to sin by a Jeroboam; but O, cursed name of Jeroboam, that would draw Israel to sin! The followers and abettors of evil are worthy of torment, but no hell is too deep for the leaders of public wickedness.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 31. We have in the new covenant no Levitical priesthood, indeed, but a pastoral and preaching office which the Lord has instituted, so that thereby the body of Christ may be edified (Eph. iv. 11). He who despises this office, and thinks that any one without distinction and without a lawful calling may exercise it, is a partaker in the sin of Jeroboam. "No one," says the Augsburg Confession, "shall teach or preach publicly in the church, or administer the sacrament, without due calling."

— It is not the metal that makes their gods, but the worship—the sacrifices. What sacrifices could there be without priests? No religion could ever want sacred masters of Divine ceremonies. God's clergy was select and honourable, branches of the holy stem of Aaron. Jeroboam rakes up his priests out of the channel of the multitude: all tribes, all persons, were good enough to his spurious devotion. Leaden priests are well fitted for golden deities. Religion receives either much honour or blemish by the quality of those who serve at her altars. We are not worthy to profess ourselves servants of the true God if we do not hold his service worthy of the best.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 32, 33. The empty pretences

of Ritualism. 1. Ritualism is not absolutely essential to spiritual religion. 2. Its highest function is only as a means, and that chiefly to the most rude and ignorant. 3. It may be altered according to the whim or wish of an irreligious sovereign. 4. It is most elaborate and showy where the worship is most idolatrous. 5. It is disappointing to the sincere and spiritual worshipper. 6. All pretences to religious zeal, contrary to God's revealed will, are but the devices of Satan, more fatally to delude men's souls.

— We must not conceal from ourselves that there are many persons who, at the bottom of their hearts, will think that Jeroboam acted wisely in the course he took, and cannot see how he could have got over the difficulty in his path but by some such course as that which he adopted. How could he otherwise have managed? The answer is, he need not have managed at all. He had been appointed king under the Divine sanction. He held his crown under the condition of obedience, and on that condition the continuance of the crown to his house was pledged to him. Nothing was wanted on his part but unreserved faith in that promise. If Jeroboam had possessed that faith he would have been free from any anxiety on the subject, he would have felt that it was safer to incur an apparent danger in pursuing the career of duty and right doing, than to seek exemption from it by unlawful doing and tortuous policy. The Lord had given him every reason to trust in the sufficiency of His protection when He had compelled king Rehoboam to dismiss the forces with which he was prepared to fall upon him in his comparatively helpless condition. If it be asked *how* he was to be secured from the danger which stood so distinctly before him, we can only answer, "We do not know." Nor had Jeroboam any need to know. God knew; and it was his clear course to do right, trusting all the rest to God.—*Kitto.*

Verse 32. The Feast of Tabernacles, to be observed in the seventh month (Lev. xxiii. 34), Jeroboam transferred to the eighth month. A plausible occasion for this arbitrary deviation from the law which repeatedly names the seventh month as the time appointed of the Lord (Lev. xxiii. 34, 39, 41), might be found in the circumstance that in the northern districts of his kingdom the grain ripened at least a month later than in the southern Judah, as this festival was to be kept at the ingathering of the fruit of the land (the grain); the proper ground, however, lay in the design to make the separation also in a religious aspect as complete as possible, although he adhered to the day of the month on account of the weak, who might take offence at the innovations. For that there were many besides the priests and Levites who were highly dissatisfied with these illegal proceedings appears from the notice (2 Chron. xiii. 16) that Israelites out of all the tribes devoted in heart to the Lord went to Jerusalem to sacrifice there to the God of their fathers. Still, not content with all this, with erecting sanctuaries and places of worship, instituting priests and changing feasts, Jeroboam himself offered sacrifice at the altar at Bethel, in order to prove himself to be the spiritual head of his kingdom.—*Keil.*

— The festivals which an entire people celebrate in remembrance of the great deeds of God for them are the support of their faith and of their life of fellowship. It is to destroy this life when, from prejudice and for the sake of outward worldly considerations, arbitrarily they are altered or abandoned.

Verse 33. As it is good and praiseworthy when kings and princes engage in the service of God along with their subjects, and set them a good example, so also is it blameworthy when they do it only to win the people over to themselves, and to secure their authority over them.—*Lange.*

— "Which he had devised of his own heart." The entire system of Jeroboam receives its condemnation

in these words. His main fault was, that he left a ritual and a worship where all was divinely authorized, for ceremonies and services which were wholly of his own devising. Not being a prophet, he had no authority to introduce religious innovations. Not having received any commission to establish new forms, he had no right to expect that any religious benefit would accrue from them. He was placed in difficult circumstances, but he met them with the arts of a politician, not with the single-mindedness of a saint. His arrangements had a certain cleverness, but they were not really wise measures; instead of securing and strengthening, they tended to corrupt, and so to weaken the nation. —*Speaker's Comm.*

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS PROPHET OF JUDAH.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. There came a man of God: an unknown prophet. Josephus suggests *Jadon*, confounding him with Iddo (2 Chron. xiii. 22), but he lived on during Abijah's reign; whereas this man died immediately. Names fade; ministries endure. By the word of the Lord—בִּדְבַר—"*By* the word" means not commanded by, but *in* the power of the word, obeying its impulsion. Jeroboam stood by the altar (see notes on xii. 33)—Acting a foremost part in the national apostasy. Verse 2. "Cried against the altar," as if ignoring the king; for the profaned altar possessed a vaster solemnity than the mere agent of its profanation. And the prediction of *its* ruin would carry with it and include the doom of the violator of God's temple—the lesser included in the greater. The "altar" also symbolically stood for the whole system of idolatry imposed now upon Israel. Josiah by name—One of the most minutely delineated prophecies of Scripture, and most minutely fulfilled, after a lapse of 860 years (2 Kings xxii. 1; xxiii 15). Evidence of literal inspiration of prophets. Possibly the word יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ—*Josiah*—may be (as Keil suggests) descriptive of the child who should do this work of retribution, and not necessarily his personal name, the word meaning "*whom Jehovah sustains.*" Yet Divine Providence arranged that the prophecy should assert itself even in the name which the predicted person bore. Verse 3. A sign the same day—A portent and pledge of the coming event. מוֹפֵת means a prodigy rather than a simple "sign." Verse 6. Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God—"Entreat," חַלֵּה, to soften; "entreat *the face*," soften the rigour of its expression. Verse 7. Come home with me—A guilesome attempt to get the man under his influence, since he had experienced his alarming power; or to lessen the startling impression which the event of his arm withering had produced on the people—an event calculated to convey an appearance of Divine rebuke of the king. If the people became alarmed the king's control would be gone. Verse 11. An old prophet in Bethel: who had been faithless amid surrounding faithlessness. His alertness to win the prophet of Judah to his house arose from (1) his interest (professional) in a fellow-prophet's mission—this feeling awoke immediately he heard of one of his own class being near. (2) A sense of shame may have stirred in him that a prophet from a distance should have come to do what he himself, being near, should have long ago done. (3) He may have desired to reinstate himself in the king's confidence, and in public estimation, by uniting himself in this way with a distinguished and true prophet. There may have been no desire on his part to induce the prophet of Judah into sinning, but he himself prevaricated in order to succeed in his wish to gratify his curiosity or calm his self-rebuke by this act of courtesy. Verse 18. An angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord—Not "the Lord spake," but an "angel," or messenger, one of his sons; hiding the real facts, and conveying a false impression. Verse 20. The word of the Lord came, &c.—Making deceitful lips speak truth. Verse 21. And he cried—Rather, "*it* cried." The man was but the passive agent; the Word of God used the man's organs of utterance. Verse 31. Bury me in the sepulchre wherein, &c.—Deeply impressed now that he was a true prophet, and that it was an evil and a bitter thing to sin against the Lord. Possibly he had a superstitious hope that by burial with this true prophet he himself might be advantaged when the dead should be raised. or that his own bones would be allowed to rest undisturbed in company with a man of God.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-10.

THE INVINCIBLE COURAGE OF A DIVINELY AUTHORISED MESSENGER

THE audacity of Jeroboam must not go unreproved or unpunished. He had assumed sacerdotal functions, and stood by the altar to offer sacrifice. He had introduced dangerous innovations, and involved the whole nation in the guilt of idolatry. His conduct is to be denounced at the very altar where his offence culminated in its highest aggravation. It required more than ordinary bravery to confront so strong-willed and reckelss a king, who seemed impatient of contradiction, and was accustomed to be obeyed. But Jehovah had already provided an agent, and qualified him for the work. A stern-visaged prophet of Judah, like a spectral figure emerging out of misty space, appears upon the scene, armed with supernatural powers before which the proud king was humbled and made to tremble. The passage illustrates *the invincible courage of a divinely authorized messenger*.

I. It aided him in the full and faithful declaration of the Divine message (verses 1-3). 1. *As to the promise of a coming avenger.* "Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name." The very name of the avenger is predicted, an unusual instance of particularity in Divine prophecies. Only three other similar instances are recorded: Israel (Gen. xvii. 19); Solomon (1 Chron. xxii. 9); and Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 1). The All-Prescient Jehovah, who sees the end from the beginning, may cause events to be foretold minutely by His prophets, though in the general law of His providence He does not do so. He only can be the most capable judge as to how much of the future should be revealed. 2. *As to the particular character of the punishment to be imposed.* "Upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places," &c. (verse 2). This prophecy was exactly fulfilled (2 Kings xxiii. 15-20). God is too righteous to indulge in idle threats. They who disregard warning are without excuse when the punishment falls. 3. *As to the visible tokens of the authenticity of the message.* "And he gave a sign the same day," &c. (verse 3). The altar was rent, and the ashes poured out (verse 5), as an evidence that the prophet was Jehovah's ambassador, and spoke with the Divine sanction. Without this sign the prophecy of an event that did not take place for three hundred and fifty years would have wanted authority with those who knew nothing about the strange, mysterious messenger. God gives to His servants all the power necessary to accomplish their difficult and often unwelcome mission; and woe be to him who has not the courage or fidelity to act in harmony with his commission—neither to fall short of it, nor to go beyond.

II. It rendered him fearless in the presence of an angry and unscrupulous monarch (verse 4). Like all usurpers and tyrants, Jeroboam's remedy for all difficulties was *force*. He would have made short work of the man who had dared to interrupt him in the very act of performing the highest function of his self-assumed priesthood, and who denounced him and his idolatrous policy in the presence of his courtiers and supporters. The divinely authorised messenger is as bold as a lion (Prov. xxviii. 1), and is not to be intimidated by the fear of consequences. Few prophets suffered more than Jeremiah; yet all the cruelties of his enemies were impotent in bribing him to silence, or in impairing his fidelity. A sense of the Divine call to service, however painful and perilous, fills the soul with an incorruptible bravery.

III. It was supported by unmistakable evidences of supernatural power.

The king's hand was withered, and the altar rent asunder (verses 4, 5). He who had not scrupled to stir up rebellion and to seize a crown, did not scruple to lay his hand menacingly on God's servants; but in vain. How unexpected was the result! God will protect His messengers, who are ever the special butts of malice: he who touches them, touches the apple of His eye. Before God strikes, He warns: He willeth not that any should perish, but rather that they should come to repentance. It does not appear that either Jeroboam or his followers were moved to repentance by all they witnessed—another example of the hardening nature of sin, and the powerlessness of external miracles to affect and transform man's spiritual nature. How many beheld the miracle-working power of Christ, and yet died in unbelief!

IV. It was not inconsistent with an act of mercy (verse 6). Jeroboam prayed, not for pardon, but for the restoration of his withered limb. An impenitent heart ever betrays itself in greater concern for its sufferings than its sins. They who in prosperity reject the warnings of God's messengers are ready enough in distress to have recourse to their prayers. To pray for those who despitefully use and persecute us is the way to obtain the promised beatitude (Matt. v. 10, 44). Those who are most severe and faithful in telling us of our sins are the most eager and genuine in rendering sympathetic help when we are in trouble. Courage and tender-heartedness go together.

V. It enabled him to resist the strongest temptation to disobedience (verses 7-10). 1. *The temptation appealed to his physical needs.* "Come home with me and refresh thyself" (verse 7). Weary and faint as he must have been with his journey, this invitation would cost the prophet some self-denial to resist. Satan ever tempts most powerfully at the weakest point and at the weakest moment. But the prophet must have no fellowship or communion with their works of darkness—not so much as even to eat and drink with them. He was not to accept the hospitality of any dweller at Bethel, in order to show in a marked way, which men generally could appreciate, God's abhorrence of the system which Jeroboam had "devised of his own heart." 2. *The temptation offered immediate temporal advantage.* "And I will give thee a reward" (verse 7). It was customary to honour a prophet with a gift if he performed any service that was requested at his hands (1 Sam. ix. 7, 8; 1 Kings xiv. 3; 2 Kings v. 5; viii. 9). The prophet was tempted with three things: royal hospitality, refreshment, and reward. How far these offers influenced the future action of the prophet can be only imperfectly conjectured. At this point of his history they had no power to corrupt his fidelity. Neither offers nor threats must be allowed to prevail with us to swerve a single step from the path of duty. 3. *The temptation was resisted by a remembrance of God's Word.* "For so was it charged me by the Word of the Lord" (verse 9). This was the weapon by which the Sinless One conquered the most furious onslaughts of the great adversary (Matt. iv. 4, 7, 10). The Word of God is an impregnable defence against which the arrows of temptation are shot in vain.

LESSONS:—1. *Faithful rebukes often produce proud wrath.* 2. *In the way of duty the Divinely-authorized messenger need fear no danger.* 3. *To reject Divine warnings aggravates transgression and invites vengeance.*

THE CALF WORSHIP DENOUNCED.

I. The great business of the prophet is evidently to denounce the altar and the sacrifices in Bethel. Of course, the rationalist teacher exclaims, "These *were* the offences of Jeroboam. He was an intruder upon the special privileges of

the Jerusalem hierarchy; he had courage to introduce priests taken from the lowest of the people; he broke through the formalities of the Levitical law. Such a man in our days would be called a reformer or asserter of national and individual independence. Therefore he is denounced by the ecclesiastics who have compiled the Jewish records." Yes, if the establishment of visible sensible worship be a great step in the progress of the human intellect—if the introduction of a set of priests continually at work to make that worship more visible, more sensual, more gross, to be a mode of fulfilling the aspirations of those who desire moral and spiritual liberty—if the breaking through the fetters of a law which restrained all sacerdotal inventions whatsoever, and bore witness continually that sacrifices were not offered to appease a tyrant, but to remove an obstacle between a righteous Lord and His unrighteous subjects—if the consequent establishment of a devil-worship be that which wise men of the nineteenth century after Christ call reformation, Jeroboam deserves all their patronage, and the man of God who came out of Judah to pronounce a curse upon his altar, all their wrath.

II. And this is precisely the question, not for this passage of the history only, but for every subsequent passage of it. The revolting kings of Israel, in whom modern enlightenment discovers the champions of human progress, were introducing the most unlimited sacerdotal tyranny, were making that sacerdotal tyranny an instrument of regal tyranny. The priests of the high places, the prophets of the grove, were building their own power upon the degradation of the multitudes whom they drew after them, were using that power to confirm every unrighteous decree, to remove every real moral restraint from the kings. The prophets, who, we are told, would never have been praised except in a book compiled by the supporters of a certain set of caste interests, were bearing a protest, at the hazard of their lives, for a righteous order which no caprices of human superstition or human will could set aside, for a spiritual authority which not only did not demand the slavery of the conscience, but was incompatible with it, for an actual relation between the Most High and His creatures which not only did not involve their regarding Him as an object of terror or distrust, but proved such habits of mind to contain the very essence of sin.

III. Men like the one we are now considering are said to speak the Word of the Lord, or sometimes in the Word of the Lord. Their function assumes that the thoughts of man's heart and the utterances of it are of all things the most sacred; that a presence is *there* which men are seeking in dark groves, on high places, in sun, or sea, or air; that this Presence is not a phantom, not a creation of their own, but He who is, He who formed them; that the best and wisest man is He who confesses this presence with awe and wonder, who believes that he is standing before a living Being to whom all within is naked and open, who desires that that Being should direct him, act upon him, use him for His own purposes, who knows that those purposes are right purposes, who is sure that they cannot concern him more than they concern his fellows. To a man thus taught and trained, idolatry was something absolutely appalling. He had no measure of its enormity, only he was sure that a people worshipping calves, seeking God in high places, were flying from a friend and a deliverer, to enemies and destroyers; from the living and the true, to death and falsehood. He knew that it was so. He was certain that he was not uttering himself or his own fancies, when he said that it was so. God was speaking through his lips: God was pronouncing sentence upon that which defied him. What signified who might stand before the altar, who might be burning incense upon it? He no more could or dared tremble at the worshipper than at the thing worshipped. Both were creatures of the Eternal God. The one was setting himself up, the other was set up in contempt of Him: each alike must come down. The truth must stand fast and fulfil itself. He had only to proclaim the truth.

IV. But how shall the idolater know it and be convinced of it? The arm, we are told, which was stretched out to perform the sacrifice, and then to seize the prophet, was dried up so that he could not pull it again to him. "Here," you say, "is a miracle; such a one as we expect in all records of this kind." Precisely, such a one as you might expect in a record of *this* kind, and as you would not expect and not meet with in a record of another kind written by the supporters of a body which was interested in superstition, and trying by all means to sustain the reputation of it. The man of God testifies to Jeroboam that the juices and springs of life are renewed from an invisible source, that it is another than the dead thing which he is worshipping who can dry them up or give them their natural flow—a protest exactly in accordance with that which Moses bore against the gods of Pharoah, a protest on behalf of regularity and law, and for a God of regularity and law, with whom are the issues of daily life and death, against the seeker of charms in natural things, against the worshipper of capricious deities. The other part of the sign is precisely of the same kind. The altar is rent and the ashes are poured out from the altar, as a sure and everlasting testimony that law and order shall not be violated with impunity by any ruler, under any religious pretext, that his religious acts are more hateful in the sight of God than all his other acts, and must hasten the vengeance upon those.

V. The story of the prophet is continued in these words. (Read verses 7-10). The invisible teacher who had bid him go forth on his journey and carry the message to the king, had made him understand as clearly, that when he had done his errand, he was to go back into Judah. He had no doubt that this was what he ought to do. It was part of his commission. The other part of it would not be faithfully discharged if this was forgotten. These words and acts of the prophet were connected with his own life, they belonged to his very self. His conscience, as well as his powers of thought and reflection, were not crushed or stifled by the Divine communication, but were awakened by it into activity. And the conscience so awakened was proof against any solicitations of the king. (Condensed from *F. D. Maurice.*)

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-10. The man of God out of Judah. 1. He comes led by the Word of God, and goes on his dark, difficult way in faith, without taking counsel with flesh and blood. 2. He stands, strong and bold, before the king, fears him not, testifies against his sins, and announces the judgment of God. 3. He makes entreaty for him who was about to lay hold on Him, and heaps coals of fire on his head. 4. He resists the offers of the king, and will not be secured by bribes.

— The testimony against the service of the false gods. 1. It proceedeth from a nameless, unknown, insignificant man, who, without worldly consequence, has nothing and knows nothing, except only the power of the Divine Word. That is the manner of the Lord in His kingdom. He accomplishes by means of small, insignificant instruments, what no king, with all his power, can do. The altars of heathendom are shattered by means of the testimony of fishers and tax-gatherers (1 Cor. i. 27-29), even as were the altars of the false worshippers of God by means of a poor, world-despised recluse. 2. It was received at first with scorn, wrath, and violence; but the wrath is powerless and avails nothing; the altar is rent, and the threatening arm is dried up. Humble entreaties then take the place of wrath (Isa. xxvi. 16). But though the withered arm be restored, the heart remains withered as before Physical aid is alway

readily received by men, whilst they shut their hearts to the testimony against their sins.—*Lange.*

Verse 1. But O, the patience and mercy of our long-suffering God, that will not strike a very Jeroboam unwarned! Judgment hovers over the heads of sinners, ere it light. If Israel afford not a bold reprover of Jeroboam, Judah shall. When the king of Israel is in all the height both of his state and his superstition, honouring his solemn day with his richest devotion, steps forth a prophet of God, and interrupts that glorious service with a loud inclamation of judgment. Doubtless, the man wanted not wit to know what displeasure, what danger must needs follow so unwelcome a message; yet, dares he, upon the commission of God, do this affront to an idolatrous king, in the midst of all his awful magnificence. The prophets of God go upon many a thankless errand. He is no messenger for God that either knows or fear the faces of men.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 2. God announces beforehand His judgments to sinners, that they may have time and space for repentance. Woe to them who misemploy the respite, for the measure of their sins will be full. In the new covenant we have a far weightier prophecy. Unto us is born a Son, named Jesus, out of the House of David; who will come again and pronounce judgment upon those who know not God, and who obey not the gospel (2 Thess. i. 8, 9).—*Lange.*

— The prophet directed his speech to the altar out of detestation of such an abomination: and, as having no hope to prevail with Jeroboam, who stood by it, and was more insensible than that altar, or than the heap of stones which Bede once preached unto.—*Trapp.*

— It was the altar, not the person of Jeroboam, which the prophet thus threatens: yet not the stones are stricken, but the founder in both their apprehensions; so dear are the devices of our own brain to us, as if they were incorporated into ourselves. There is no opposition of which we are so sensible as that of religion. That the royal altar should be thus polluted by dead men's bones and the blood of the priests, was not more unpleasing than that all this should be done by a child of the house of David; for Jeroboam well saw that the throne and the altar must stand or fall together; that a Son of David could not have such power over the altar, without an utter subversion of the government, of the succession; therefore is he thus galled with this comminatory prediction.

— Probably a prophecy against Jeroboam's own person, instead of against the insensate altar, would have touched him less nearly. But this showed that his policy would come to nought, and that the power he was establishing with so much solicitude would be utterly subverted, while the house of David would still subsist in its strength, for only so could a king of that house be able to do this upon an altar in this realm. The king grasped the full meaning of this message, and it filled him with rage against the man who had dared to deliver it then and there.—*Kitto.*

Verse 3. The miracles which the Lord our God performs are not only proofs of his almighty power to amaze us, but likewise significant signs which reveal to us His eternal decrees, and lead us to the recognition of that heavenly truth which sanctifies our hearts.

Verse 4. Although faithful teachers often accomplish nothing and fail most signally with men of high degree, yet must they never on this account abandon their office. For if thou warn him thou hast delivered thy soul (Ezek. iii. 19), and although the obdurate remain untouched, yet it shall not remain without fruit (Isa. lv. 10). How did even this warning work itself out and bear fruit after three hundred years (2 Kings xxiii. 15). Sinners eminent by wealth and position will only listen to prophets

who are dumb dogs and cannot bark (Isa. lvi. 10). When a true servant of the Lord cries out, "The axe is already laid at the root of the tree," they arise in wrath and cry out, "Seize him" (2 Tim. iv. 1-5). He who attacks a servant of God because of his testimony, never remains unpunished. In vain doth the enemy stretch forth his hand against those who are under God's protection (Job vii. 44; Lev. iv. 29; Ps. xxxvii. 17). Those who will not listen to the word of truth, God often visits with bodily pain in order to humble them and teach them to pray and supplicate.—*Cramer.*

— A fearful stroke, had he well considered it; but his heart was as hard as his hand withered. Jeroboam had as great a miracle wrought before him herein, as St. Paul had at his conversion; but without the Spirit's concurrence, neither miracle, nor ministry, nor misery, can in the least measure mollify the heart of an obdurate and obstinate sinner. Valens, the Arian emperor, would have signed a sentence of banishment against Basil, but could not by reason of a sudden trembling of his right hand, so that he could not write one letter of his own name, but for anger tore the paper in pieces, and let Basil alone. There is a story of one of our late innovators, who, turning with the times and beginning to bow towards altars, never went upright more; and of another who, hearing perjury condemned by a godly preacher, and how it never escaped unpunished, said in a bravery, "I have often forsworn myself, and yet my right hand is no shorter than my left." These words he had scarce uttered, when such an inflammation arose in that hand, that he was forced to go to the chirurgeon and cut it off lest it should have infected the whole body; and so it became shorter than the other. The Jews tell us, that when Jeroboam's hand was dried up, the false prophets told him that this fell out by chance, and so kept him from thinking of God who had smitten him. Let the saints learn to put their confidence in God; for if He deny course and influence, the arm of all adverse power shrinketh up presently. —*Trapp.*

Verses 4, 5. The importance of the authentication of the man of God by a miraculous sign appears from the conduct of Jeroboam towards him. Without waiting for the confirmation of his word by the announced miraculous sign, the king stretches his hand towards him with the words, "Lay hold on him;" but must now experience in the hand with which he could set aside the prophet who was disagreeable to him, the omnipotence of the Lord who has power to protect his servants. The outstretched hand is withered by a miracle—that is, stiffened, deprived of vital juice—so that he cannot draw it in again. On this follows the miraculous sign announced, and Jeroboam's wicked arrogance is broken down by the double miracle; he is constrained to entreat the prophet to intercede for him with the Lord his God, that his hand may be restored.—*Keil.*

— Resolute wickedness is impatient of reproof, and, instead of yielding to the voice of God, rebelleth. Just and discreet reprehension doth not more reform some sinners than exasperate others. How easy is it for God to cool the courage of proud Jeroboam! The hand which his rage stretches out, dries up and cannot be pulled back again; and now stands the king of Israel, like some antique statue, in a posture of impotent endeavour, so disabled to the hurt of the prophet, that he cannot command that piece of himself. What are the great potentates of the world in the powerful hand of the Almighty? Tyrants cannot be so harmful as they are malicious. It must needs be a great strait that could drive a proud heart to beg mercy where he bent his persecution; so doth Jeroboam, holding it no scorn to be beholden to an enemy. In extremities the worst men can be content to sue for favour where they have spent their malice.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 6. He who desires for him-

self the intercession of others must himself draw near humbly and penitently to God and implore His mercy. In this wise can we know if we are indeed children of God and guided by His Spirit, if we pray and supplicate for those who have done their worst to us, and thus overcome evil with good (1 Pet. iii. 9).

— The faith of the wicked in the prayers of the good. 1. Shows that religion may be respected while it is personally ignored. 2. That religion bears external evidence of its own superiority. 3. That the wicked are ever ready to share in the benefits of religion while they reject its claims. 4. That the example of a religious life has a powerful influence for good.

— The display of miraculous power will not avail to change the heart. 1. It appeals mainly to the external senses. 2. The judgment may be convinced while the will remains unchanged; men reject religion, not for want of evidence, but for want of will. 3. To refuse divinely attested truth is to incur the greater guilt.

Verse 7. Although the ungodly often hold in high esteem these holy men especially raised up by God, yet they never follow their instructions and warnings (Mark vi. 19). What boots it that we gratefully acknowledge the material blessings which meet us, if we leave unfulfilled the very object of these blessings, namely, the turning of our hearts from sin and the world to God. Unbelief and impenitence cannot be outweighed by even the highest friendship and humanity. When the world can effect nothing more by force and threats, it seeks to gain its ends by plausible love tokens. —*Osiander*.

Verses 8, 9. There is no bribe to which the man of God will yield: to him, that which God has commanded him seems, in all times and all places, in evil as in good days, the fixed and definite plan of action. The best weapon and defence against the snares of our spiritual enemy is the law and Word of God. It is far from being unimportant with whom we eat and drink, *i.e.*, in fellowship and intimate alliance (1 Cor. v. ii).—*Starke*.

Verse 9. The reasons for the Divine commands. 1. Are not always apparent. 2. Are always grounded in wisdom and righteousness. 3 Disobedience is inexcusable even where the Divine reasons are not understood.

— He was charged also not to return by the way that he came; probably lest the account of what was done should have reached the ears of any of the people through whom he had passed, and he suffer inconveniences on the account, either by persecution from the idolaters, or from curious people delaying him in order to cause him to give an account of the transactions which took place at Bethel. This is a reason why he should not return by the same way; but what *the* reason of this part of the charge, if not the above, is not easy to see.

— This command seems to have been given simply to test the obedience of the prophet by laying him under a positive as well as a moral obligation. When he turned back with the old prophet, and retraversed a road over which he had already passed, he disobeyed this injunction, as by eating and drinking he disobeyed the other.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 10. If in a certain position thou hast done what God commanded, and left undone what He forbade, then go on thy way peaceful and content, how dark and unknown soever it may seem to thee.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 11—32.

Temptations to Disobedience.

I. Assail us at the moment we are most clearly conscious of duty done. The mysterious prophet of Judah had, with great effort and at great peril,

accomplished his important mission, and, in obedience to the positive directions he had received, was returning homeward by a different route, when a temptation came upon him from a most unexpected quarter. It is ever so. There is little space afforded for self-gratulation on the achievement of one difficult task ere we are confronted with another; and woe to him who is off his guard at that moment. It is not always in the midst of the storm that the mariner finds his greatest danger, but in the deceitful and uncertain calm when some sudden and unexpected gust may strike his vessel unprepared. It was only lately that the *Eurydice*, a noble British man-of-war, after successfully navigating the world, was approaching the shores of England with every stitch of canvas spread, when her sails were smitten with a terrific blast, and in a few moments she heeled over and sank to the bottom of the sea, with hundreds of brave seamen whose hearts were beating with joy in the near prospect of home! (1 Cor. x. 12).

II. **Are most dangerous when they come to us with a pretended religious sanction** (verse 18). The prophet of Bethel was *old* (verse 11), and commanded the reverence that belongs to age. He was recognized as a *prophet*, and had so much regard for his sacred office as to be absent from the king's idolatrous sacrifices, though he allowed his sons to be there (verses 11, 12). His object might be to curry favour with the king by making the man of God contradict himself, and thus impair the moral weight and authority of the message that had been so faithfully delivered, and weaken its impression on the minds of the people. He gained his end by telling a lie—a lie that was aggravated by its boldness and profanity (verse 18). The prophet of Judah was too guileless to suspect the trap that was laid for him, though, being himself in direct communication with Jehovah, he ought not to have acted upon a contradiction of the command imparted to himself, or any other authority than that from which he received it. He was beguiled; he turned back, and his doom was sealed. The most dangerous allurements of evil are presented when it robes itself in the external garb of goodness. When rack, and sword, and faggot fail to intimidate, a false show of piety will fatally deceive! Ah! how much need have we to cry—

> Awake, my soul, when sin is nigh,
> And keep it still awake.

III. **Cannot be yielded to with impunity.** 1. *The disobedient are made conscious of their sin* (verses 20-22). The two prophets were startled at their humble meal by hearing the voice of the Lord uttering unmistakable condemnation; and this time the false prophet was made the vehicle of a true message from heaven, which he understood, we may well suppose, with real concern, and delivered with reluctance. A conviction of wrong-doing always precedes punishment: the sinner will be made to understand what it is for which he suffers. 2. *The disobedient are certainly punished* (verses 23, 24). The punishment may be strange, singular, and in a form utterly unexpected; but it will be certain. Here a lion was made the instrument of vengeance. It is said that lions like not to attack man unless driven to extremity for prey, and that an ass is choice food for a lion, while it is well known that a lion kills to eat. But in this case we see the natural instinct of the brute controlled by a superior power: the man is assailed and slain; his body and that of the ass remain unmolested. God is not restricted to any one method of punishing transgression: all the powers of the universe wait on His bidding. 3. *The punishment is evident* (verse 25). The scene was patent to every passer-by, and soon became the common talk of the city. Where the offence was committed, there its punishment was witnessed. Jehovah will vindicate His righteous

government of the universe by the most public and terrible punishment of sin (2 Cor. v. 10). 4. *The punishment of the disobedient is not unlamented* (verses 26-30). The awful transactions in which the prophet of Bethel was thus called to take a part could not but make a profound impression on his mind, and might be beneficial in promoting his spiritual reformation. He sorrowed over the unfortunate fate of his brother-prophet, and interred his body in his own tomb (verses 29 30). Do not think, O sinner! that your transgressions are unnoticed, or that you are the only one affected by them: they cannot be regarded with indifference by a Just and Beneficent God. And if you will persist in your disobedience, breaking through all restrictions, and spurning all help—if you will court ruin, and voluntarily surrender youself to the inevitable consequences of your sins—He who has done all He consistently can to recall you to obedience resolves you shall not perish unwept and unlamented; and as you drop into the abysmal depths of unutterable woe the voice of Infinite Pity shall exclaim in tones which, though not intended to do so, can only sharpen the stings of remorse: O! that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments, &c. (Isa. xlviii. 18).

IV. Will not prevent the ultimate fulfilment of the Divine Word (verses 31, 32). "The saying which he cried by the Word of the Lord shall surely come to pass." Thus did the faithless prophet bear his testimony to the faithfulness of God. Jehovah is stronger than the Tempter, and will ere long expose his most plausible deceptions, baffle his wicked designs, and consign him to his own place.

LESSONS:—1. *False prophets are the most dangerous and fatal enemies of God's people.* 2. *They who seek to seduce the soul from its allegiance to God's Word, however specious their pretexts, are the emissaries of Satan.* 3. *We may be tempted to do evil by counterfeit appearances of piety, when we should not be driven to it by any fear of suffering.*

This passage may also be homiletically treated as follows:—

AN UNFAITHFUL PROPHET.

I. Is content to live in the midst of idolatry and moral corruption without lifting up a protesting voice (verse 11). The prophet of Bethel could not be ignorant of the innovations of the idolatrous king; and while it does not appear that he actually sanctioned them by his presence, he did not restrain his sons from worshipping at the unholy altar. He lacked the courage to protest against the wickedness of the king, though he might be often powerfully moved to do so. He resisted the impulse until it became feebler; and he sank down a voiceless witness to the insults that were daily offered to his God. "He seemed to be one of those mixed characters, true to history and human nature, which perpetually appear among the sacred persons of the Old Testament; moved by a partial wavering inspiration; aiming after good, yet failing to attain it; full of genuine tender admiration for the prophet of whose death he had been the unwilling cause, the mouthpiece of truths which he himself but faintly understood." To disobey repeated calls to duty only confirms the soul in its unfaithfulness, and renders it content with evils against which it was wont to loudly and faithfully protest. There are times when silence becomes a sin.

II. Will descend to the most deceptive practices to tempt the faithful from their allegiance (verses 12-19). What the prophet of Judah did, showed

the old prophet what he should have done. Filled with shame for his neglect, and wishful to restore himself in his own opinion and in the opinion of others who had perhaps accused him of unfaithfulness, he sought to have intercourse with so courageous a witness for God, and to gain prestige by having him under his own roof. The objects were thoroughly selfish, and to accomplish it he did not scruple to tell a lie (verse 18). The most abandoned crave for companionship in their sins, and will resort to all kinds of methods to bring down others to their own level. It is impossible to say to what depths of iniquity one single act of unfaithfulness may lead (Luke xvi. 10).

III. Is compelled to own the solemn reality and authority of the Divine Word. A message came to the old prophet the source and meaning of which he could not mistake (verses 20-22). God may often speak through a wicked prophet. He did so through Balaam, uttering the sublimest oracles of blessing, though that sooth-sayer would fain have cursed Israel. The Bethel-prophet was also firmly convinced that the prophecy against the altar would certainly come true; and he therefore directed his sons to bury his corpse in the same grave as that of the Judah-prophet (verses 30-32). "The bones of the seducer and seduced being thus intermingled in the tomb, it so happened, as the former probably intended, that his bones escaped at the appointed time the defilement to which they would otherwise have been subjected. The tomb of the prophet that came out of Judah was then recognised, and for his sake the contents were spared from dishonour" (2 Kings xxiii. 17, 18). The Word of God will vindicate itself, even in the lips of those who have sometimes ignored its authority.

IV. Involves his victims in fatal disaster (verses 23-26). We are ready to admit that the old prophet did not intend to bring upon his victim the result that really happened. He might have a vague impression that his disobedience would not escape some kind of punishment; but had he foreseen how awful and immediate that punishment would be, he would not have persisted in his plot. But that is ever the way with wrong-doing; it goes farther than it intended, and stands aghast at the ruin it has itself produced.

V. Need not be devoid of brotherly sympathy and respect, nor be beyond the reach of reformation (verses 28-30). The Bethel-prophet sincerely mourned over the sad fate of his brother prophet, and, with the most genuine respect, reverently interred his body in his own grave. The heart that was thus touched with fraternal pity was perhaps also smitten with grief on account of sin. He repented his unfaithfulness in the past; and he showed his desire to henceforth imitate the spirit and example of the dead prophet, by giving particular directions that his body should be laid in the same grave. As if he said:—"If I can have no more fellowship with my brother in life, I will at least be united to him in death; our common grave, to which I shall soon go down in sorrow, shall be a lasting testimony against the sin of Jeroboam."

LESSONS:—1. *It is a great honour and a great responsibility to be a prophet of the Lord.* 2. *An unfaithful prophet has a great power for evil.* 3. *The unfaithfulness of the messenger does not invalidate the Divine authority of the message.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 11-32. The history of these two prophets offers an important view of the relation of this class to the new order of things: in the prophet out of Judah we see a man of God full of life and strength, but who yet proved unstable in these disturbed times; in the old Israelite we look upon one

in whom the fire is almost quenched, it only glimmers faintly—a type of the expiring high and manly strength of Israel; he is still upheld by faith in God's Word rather than by self-reliance. They both yet speak and testify in death. The fall and death of the man of Judah set forth two great truths. 1. He who thinketh he standeth, let him take heed (1 Cor. x. 12). He had conducted himself grandly and nobly, and victoriously withstood a severe temptation, yet he yielded to a lesser one. The higher a man stands the deeper is his fall, and to whom much is given from him will much be required (1 Cor. xvi. 13; x. 13). Only those who are true unto death can obtain the crown of life. 2. How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out (Rom. xi. 33). He who is holy in all His ways, knows how to establish firmly that which is threatened with destruction and annihilation by human treachery and deceit. The death and the grave of the man of God announce, in louder and more threatening accents than did his lips, the altar is rent.—*Von Gerlach.*

Verses 11-19. I do not know any passage more useful than this for disabusing us of a prejudice which the mere word *prophet* is liable to create in our minds. "If the man was inspired," we say to ourselves, "inspired by God, we must be sure he would do the right thing, and say the right thing. It would destroy all our security if we thought otherwise." No, brethren; it would destroy no security at all which the Bible designs to give us. On the contrary, we shall lose a great security, we shall fall into a great danger, if we do not strictly adhere to the teaching of the Bible on this subject, but set up certain canons of our own. The first obvious lesson which this passage teaches us is, that a prophet, a true prophet, a prophet of God, might be grossly deceived. The second is, that he *must* be deceived if he yielded to any pretences of inspiration on the part of any man, though that man were called a prophet, and were a prophet, when what he said went against a sure witness and conviction as to his own duty. The third is, that a prophet, not habitually a deceiver, might on a certain occasion wilfully deceive—in the plain language of Holy Writ, might lie. All these statements we accept on the authority of Scripture. And if we accept them, we may derive the very greatest profit from them. We are often apt to suppose that a prophet or inspired man is one who is raised above laws and government, who can lay down laws for himself, whose internal power is itself the rule for others and for his own conduct. The Scripture teaches us quite a different lesson. The characteristic quality of the prophet, when he is true, is obedience. He is nothing in himself. He is merely a servant. In the acknowledgment of his service, of the power which is upon him, his strength consists. But it is no mere impulse to which he yields himself. He is liable to all the same chances and foolish impulses as other people. He is particularly liable to confound these impulses with God's teaching and commands. He is, therefore, to be more suspicious of himself, more watchful against this confusion, than other men. If he once forgets the Invisible Ruler and Lawgiver, no one will commit such flagrant errors, such falsehood, such blasphemy.—*Maurice.*

Verses 11-15. The old prophet, when he hears of the man of God, hastens upon his way, and spares neither care nor pains to see him and bring him to his house. How much time, pains, and money are expended by the children of this world to see and hear what will gratify their senses, whilst they stir neither hand nor foot to acquire that which pertains to their peace and salvation!

Verse 11. Doubtless he was a prophet of God, but corrupt, resty, vicious. Prophecy doth not always presuppose sanctification: many a one hath had visions from God, who shall

never enjoy the vision of God. A little holiness is worth much illumination.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 14. The danger of delay. 1. Gives an opportunity to be overtaken by the tempter. 2. The difficulties of our mission seem to multiply. 3. Often involves suffering and disaster.

Verses 16-19. So in indifferent ordinary matters, which God has either ordered or forbidden, we must observe unerring obedience. Whatever obtains success and position by means of deceit cannot be followed by blessing, but rather by a curse. The Scripture is not silent concerning the sins of the man of God; and this, not that we may excuse our sins by his, but that we may guard ourselves from haughtiness and spiritual pride.

Verse 18. There is no temptation so dangerous as that which comes shrouded under a vail of holiness, and pretends authority from God Himself. Jeroboam threatens, the prophet stands undaunted: Jeroboam fawns and promises, the prophet holds constant. Now comes a grey-headed seer, and pleads a counter message from God; the prophet yields and transgresses. Satan may affright us as a fiend, but he seduces us as an angel of light. Who would have looked for a liar under hoary hairs and a holy mantle? —*Bp. Hall.*

— Falsehood. 1. Is always inexcusable. 2. Aggravated when in the garb of sanctity. 3. Never fails to produce mischief. 4. An evidence of moral degradation.

— The door of his heart seems to have been standing ajar, almost half opened already, to the invitations of the old man. Otherwise, surely he would have said: "Thou a prophet! How is it, then, that thou dwellest at Bethel, the house of Jeroboam's corrupt worship? If thou hadst been indeed a prophet of the Lord, thou wouldst have denounced that worship, and I should not have been sent from Judah to lift up my voice against it." —*Wordsworth.*

Verses 20-22. The same sentence which the old prophet pronounced upon the man of God he pronounced upon himself, while he had led and betrayed him to disobedience. How often does the judgment which we utter for others fall upon ourselves, when we have sinned equally, or in greater measure (Rom. ii. 1).—*Lange.*

— O woful prophet! when he looks on his host, he sees his executioner; while he is feeding his body, he hears of his carcase; at the table he hears of his denied sepulchre; and all this for eating and drinking where he was forbidden by God, though bidden as from God. The violation of the least charge of God is mortal; no pretences can warrant the transgression of a Divine command.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Punishment. 1. Results from disobedience. 2. Is not inflicted without due warning. 3. Is certain. 4. In the hands of God, is never unjust.

Verse. 21. It has been asked, how did the prophet from Judah sin? or, at any rate, how did he sin so grievously as to deserve the punishment of death? Was he not justified in believing that God might revoke His command? Would it not have been wrong in him to suspect the old prophet of telling a lie? To such enquiries it may be replied: With God is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. He cannot revoke a command until the circumstances under which the command was given are materially changed. The circumstances here were not changed. Again, if God gives a command and revokes it, He will revoke it as plainly and with as much evidence as He gave it. Here there was neither the same plainness, nor as strong evidence. The evidence to the man of God was in the one case the mere word of a man, and of a man who, by his lingering at Bethel, yet not rebuking Jeroboam, was clearly not a very good man; while in the other case the evidence had been the direct word of God. It was not the duty of the man of God to disbelieve the old prophet; but it

was his duty not to have suffered himself to be persuaded. He should have felt that his obedience was being tried, and should have required, ere he considered himself released, *the same, or as strong evidence* as that on which he had received the obligation. With respect to the question whether the sin was such a heinous one as to deserve death, we may answer—first, that the sin, disobedience to certain positive commands of God, was one which it was at this time very important to punish signally, since it was exactly the sin of Jeroboam and his adherents; and secondly, that *temporal* death is not among God's heaviest punishments, that it comes on men both naturally and miraculously for light offences, and that in such cases we may regard it as sent in lieu of future punishment, and therefore as in some sort a mercy. We are not to suppose that the man of Judah perished eternally because he perished temporally.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verses 23-31. A stern punishment, it will be said, for such a crime. An *actual* punishment, certainly—one which asserted the fact that a prophet will not be more, but less, excused for his transgressions than another man. What was the *magnitude* of the punishment, we are no judges. A man who has been witness of a great national sin, and has foretold a great national calamity, who has found out the falsehood of a friend and a prophet, and who is conscious of having done wrong himself, may not think the sentence a very hard one which calls him out of a confused world; or more hard because it comes in a form which assures him that there is an eternal order which will vindicate itself in spite of his errors and those of all other men. A man of God who had learnt to trust God, could trust Him when He was slaying him, and see that there was a deep and awful righteousness and wisdom in the way in which the creatures of God going forth to seek their meat from Him may, without the least departure from the ordinary law of their kind, be made the instruments of punishing man's transgressions. The prophet who betrayed him, and then had the heavy punishment of being forced to proclaim the wrong which he himself instigated, is surely the greater object of compassion, especially if, as the narrative half leads us to suspect, his conscience was blunted, and he was able to understand Jeroboam's sin without any keen sense of his own. A man with a clear apprehension of the evil doings of rulers, and admiration for those who protest against them with a prophetical power of uttering the truth, yet with no love of truth or resolute abhorrence of falsehood, is a very painful but a very instructive spectacle. Everyone must be conscious of something akin to such a state of mind—some possibility of it, at all events, in himself. He should think of *that* with trembling and with the prayer—"See if there be any wicked way in me. Lead me in the way everlasting." There is something very pathetic in the homage to a truer and better man, which is expressed in the words—"Lay my bones beside his bones." The lion slew him for returning with me to eat bread and drink water; yet I should have been glad to die his death; for I feel that he was right within, and, therefore, that there is a sacredness in his carcase which I would wish mine to share! *Maurice.*

Verses 23-25. The judgments of God often fall suddenly and unexpectedly, thus proving that though long delayed, they are sure to come, even as this, after the lapse of three hundred years, was the punishment threatened for the golden calf-worship.

Verses 23, 24. **The last dread journey.** 1. Was entered on with the oppressive consciousness that it must lead to death. 2. Was occupied with tormenting apprehensions as to what might be the particular form of death. 3. Was suddenly terminated by the appointed agent of retribution. 4. How many sad, painful journeys there are in the course of human life! &

Who can tell the issue of a single journey?

Verse 23. This old Bethelite that had taken pains to come and fetch the man of God into sin, will not now go back with him to accompany his departure. Doubtless he was afraid to be enwrapped in the judgment which he saw hanged over that obnoxious head. Thus the mischievous guides of wickedness leave a man when they have led him to his bane, as familiar devils forsake their witches when they have brought them once into fetters.

Verse 24. The very wild beasts are led by a providence; their wise and powerful Creator knows how to serve himself of them. The lions guard one prophet, kill another, according to the commission received from their Maker. What sinner can hope to escape unpunished when every creature of God is ready to be an avenger of evil? Where a holy man buys so dearly such a slight frailty, what shall become of our heinous and presumptuous sins? Violent events do not always argue the anger of God; even death itself is to His servants a fatherly castigation.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 25-29. The chastisement with which God visits our fellow-men for their sins is both a warning to reflect upon our sins and deserts, and a call to work active deeds of love with all our might, in life and in death.

— The fierce beast stands by the carcase, as to avow his own act and to tell who sent him, so to preserve that body which he had slain. O wonderful work of God! The executioner is turned guardian; and as the officer of the Highest, commands all other creatures to stand aloof from his charge, and command the fearful ass that brought this burden thither not to stir thence, but to stand ready pressed to carry it to the sepulchre; and now, when he hath sufficiently witnessed to all passengers that this act was not done upon his own hunger, but upon the quarrel of his Maker, he delivers up his charge to that old prophet who was no less guilty of this blood than himself.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 28. These strange circumstances at once showed the miraculous nature of the death, and were of a nature to call men's attention to the matter, and cause the whole story to be bruited abroad. By these means an incident which Jeroboam would have wished to be hushed up, became, no doubt, the common talk of the whole people.

Verses 30, 31. We often for the first time, at the grave of a friend, recognise what we possessed in him, and how we have sinned against him. One look into the open grave of one dear to us in life is adapted beyond anything to remind us of our own end. It is a very natural thing to rest in death near those who were closely bound to us in life by ties of blood or strong affection; but yet stronger should be the wish to die in the Lord, and enter into eternal glory. Then, whatever in the providence of God we may find our grave, there shall we rest in peace, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof (Psa. xxiv. 1).—*Lange.*

Verse 30. Grief. I. One of the fruits of sin. II. Is never out of place at the grave. III. Is intensified when at the grave of one whose death we have accelerated. IV. May lead to a blessed reformation of life.

— It is hard to find a man absolutely wicked: some grace will betray itself in the most forsaken breasts. It is a cruel courtsey to kill a man, and then to help him to his grave; to betray a man with our breath, and then bedew him with our tears. The prophet had needed no such friend, if he had not met with such an enemy.

Verse 32. The infallibility of the Divine Word. I. Is not affected by time or the opposition of men. II. Is sustained by the testimony of competent witnesses. III. Is a powerful reason for placing implicit faith in it. IV. Constitutes it an unerring standard of judgment.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 33, 34.

An Inveterate Sinner.

I. That an inveterate sinner is indifferent alike to entreaty and warning. "After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way." There is something exceedingly obstinate and perverse, as well as blinding and infatuating, in idolatry. The gracious overtures of Jehovah through the prophet Ahijah (chap. xi. 37, 38), the prediction against the altar and the miraculous and awe-inspiring events in connection with it, sent as much in mercy as in anger, were surely sufficient to have affected and alarmed any heart not wholly and incorrigibly hardened: and yet they had no effect on Jeroboam! "All these wonderful accidents, as God's hammers, did but beat upon cold iron." This state of mind is not acquired all at once. It is the result of repeated rejections of God's grace, of stifled convictions, and a love of sin for its own sake. An inveterate sinner is an occasion of sorrow to ministers, to angels, to God!

II. That an inveterate sinner adds to his guilt by a stolid persistency in the same course of iniquity. "But made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places." Among the worst of heathens, the priesthood was filled with respectable men: but Jeroboam made no discrimination. Any strolling vagrant who offered himself was accepted, irrespective of moral or intellectual fitness. The king became more and more careless as to the character and motives of the men he appointed. The spiritual office is put to shame if borne by men who make a traffic of religion, and are intent only on filling their own hands. Wicked men grow worse and worse, till they have filled up the measure of their sins, and so wrath come upon them to the uttermost (Rev. ix. 21; xvi. 9, 11).

III. That an inveterate sinner will not escape the most complete punishment. "And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam—even to destroy it from the face of the earth." Sin will not always triumph. Its glaring abominations cry to heaven for vengeance; and that vengeance, though long delayed, will fall with terrible and desolating power. When neither the severity nor the patient long-suffering of his God brings to repentance a man who walks in evil ways, he is brought by his own sin under the sentence for the obdurate, namely, temporal and eternal ruin (2 Tim. iii. 13; John viii. 34).

Lessons:—1. *Unrepented sin hardens the heart.* 2. *The goodness of God will not leave the most inveterate unwarned.* 3. *Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 33, 34. Apparently the witness which the man of God bore, and the death which he died, were in vain. The destruction of an altar, and the withering of a hand which was cured again, were lessons soon forgotten. A law once broken, there must be continual new transgressions to justify the first. A superstition once established will go on increasing and multiplying itself. At last the sense of being under any authority will vanish almost wholly from the mind of the rebellious ruler. He will say—using the words in precisely the opposite sense to that in which they are used in the parable—"May I not do what I will with mine own?" As the necessary retribution for such a state of mind, he will become more and

more a slave. The priests whom he has made will insist on ever higher prizes for their ignominious work. To soothe the fears which haunt him after the fear of a Righteous Being has been cast aside, he will ask those whom he has put in the place of his conscience what acts he must do that he may seem a religious man to them, possibly at last to himself.—*Maurice.*

— The means to strengthen or ruin the civil power is either to establish or destroy the right worship of God. The way to destroy religion is to embase the dispensers of it. This is to give the royal stamp to a piece of lead. It is a sad thing when all other employments shall empty themselves into the ministry; when men shall repair to it not for preferment, but refuge, like malefactors flying to the altars only to save their lives, or like those of Eli's race (1 Sam. ii. 36), that should come crouching and seeking to be put into the priest's office that they may eat a piece of bread.—*R. South.*

Verse 33. Idolatry. I. An evil way. II. Delusive. III. Dangerous. IV. Corrupting. V. Leads to destruction.

— He exercised no discretion, but allowed anyone to become a priest, without regard to birth, character, or social position. We may suspect from this that the office was not greatly sought, since no civil governor who cared to set up a priesthood would wish to degrade it in public estimation. Jeroboam did impose one limitation, which would have excluded the very poorest class. The candidate for consecration was obliged to make an offering of one young bullock and seven rams (2 Chron. xiii. 9).—*Speaker's Comm.*

— The authoritative source of the ministry. I. Is not the will of the aspirant. II. Not the exigencies of a false religious system. III. Not the appointment of the crown. IV. But the call of God.

Verse 34. This persistence in wrong, after the warning given him, was such a sin as to bring a judgment, not only on Jeroboam himself, but on his family. Jeroboam's departure from the path of right forfeited the crown (chap. xi. 38), and in that forfeiture was involved naturally the destruction of his family, for in the East, when one dynasty supplants another, the ordinary practice is for the new king to destroy all the males belonging to the house of his predecessor.

— Diminution, disquiet, and desolation of families, is the fruit of sin. He promised himself that the calves would secure the crown to his family, but it proved they lost it and sunk his family. Those betray themselves that think by any sin to support themselves.—*M. Henry.*

CHAPTER XIV.

THE REIGNS OF JEROBOAM AND REHOBOAM.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Abijah, the son of Jeroboam—Natural heir to the kingdom. His sickness, therefore, seemed to imperil the continuance of Jeroboam's house. Verse 2. There is Ahijah the prophet—He was appropriately selected, because Ahijah was the prophet who, in Solomon's days, pledged the kingdom to Jeroboam (chap xi. 29). And since Ahijah promised him a "sure house" (xi. 38), though conditional upon his piety, he sent to him to learn how this illness accorded with the prediction: he desired the rewards, though he forsook the course, of righteousness. Verse 3. Take with thee loaves, cracknels, and honey—These were gifts which a humble peasant woman would take, and accorded with the disguised appearance of the king's wife. The "ten loaves" were more probably a kind of hearth cake—נִקֻּדִים, κολλυρίδες (*Sept.*) *Crustula (Vulg.).* Verse 4. Could not see, for his eyes were set—Keil thinks that he suffered from "grey cataracts," resulting from the

decay of the optic nerves through age, as in the case of Eli (1 Sam. iv. 15). Verse 9. **Done evil above all that were before thee**—Inasmuch as he had established idolatry as a legalised "state institution." **Hast cast Me behind thy back**—The most forcible expression possible, signifying deliberate insult and contempt of Jehovah. It only occurs again in Ezek. xxiii. 35, *q. v.* Verse 10. **Cut off from Jeroboam him that, &c.**—"An expression no doubt originally used of dogs" *(Lange)*, and therefore a contemptuous description of ignominious persons. Only used of those in great disfavour in parallel Scriptures. *Keil*, however, differs from this exposition of the phrase, and regards it as a forceful and figurative expression of "extermination of a family to the last man." **Him that is shut up and left**—An alliterative phrase—עָצוּר וְעָזֻב—probably meaning *those under guardians, not of age. Keil* suggests, *him who is left to himself—unmarried. Thenius* renders the whole sentence thus: "*All* the male descendants of the king, even the *minors* also," were threatened with destruction. Verse 14. **Cut off the house of Jeroboam that day; but what? even now.** "That day," זֶה הַיּוֹם; *this, to-day*, viz., cut off the house of Jeroboam, *this very day*, in the death of his son. "*But what? Even now*"—וּמַה גַּם־עַתָּה. And what is happening even now? or, but what [say I]? Even now [the usurper is raised up]. See how truly this was a fact (chap. xv. 27). Verse 15. **Made their groves**—Their *Asherahs;* statues of the female deity elsewhere called Ashtarte. Verse 17. **Tirzah**—Now Taltise, a scene of eminent beauty (Song Sol. vi. 4), chosen as a scene of royal residence on this account, situate about three hours' journey east of Samaria.

Verses 21-31. From incidents associated with the kingdom of ISRAEL, the historian now turns to JUDAH. Verse 28. **Naamah an Ammonitess**—*Sept.* reads: "Daughter of Ana [Hanun?] son of Naas [Nahash], king of the Ammonites. Her heathen extraction is marked as indicating her natural alienation from the religion of Jehovah. As queen-mother, she had great influence in the Government. Verse 23. **Images and groves**—On "groves," *vide* Note on verse 15, *supra*. Here מַצֵּבָה, "images" or *pillars*," from נָצַב, to be firmly set, or made fast; probably stone pillars, or monumental idols, representing the male deity, Baal, as the Ashterahs, wooden idols, represented the female deity. Verse 24. **There were also sodomites in the land**—הַקָּדֵשִׁים. These were vicious paramours, detestable persons who practised, as a religious rite, a vile self-desecration. They were male prostitutes, and are ranked in Scripture with harlots (Deut. xxiii. 17). Verse 25. **Shishak, king of Egypt**—On the Karnak bas-relief this Sheshonk (as he is named in Egyptian monuments) is represented as dragging Jewish captives.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-20.

DIVINE JUDGMENTS.

CALAMITIES are now fast closing round and accumulating upon the head of the impenitent Jeroboam. The power he has defied and provoked must make itself felt; and the righteousness of the Divine mercy, so long and so often despised, must be vindicated. The crisis of his fate is approaching. Yet another and last effort is made to save him. As the coming tempest gives signals of its advance, and reaches the climax of its fury by graduated stages, so the judgments of heaven do not overtake the wicked without pre-admonition and ample opportunity for repentance.

I. That Divine judgments are not sent without due warning. 1. *This warning is repeated.* "At that time" (verse 1). The force of this phrase is to connect the narrative which follows with Jeroboam's persistence in his evil courses. The withered hand, the rent altar, the solemn message of the mysterious prophet of Judah and his melancholy fate, were so many warnings to the impenitent king. To all these yet another is added; and the event here related is the first judgment upon Jeroboam for his obduracy, the beginning of the cutting off of his house from the face of the earth. God never wearies in His efforts to save the sinner: His voice is ever calling him to repentance. 2. *This warning appeals to the tenderest human feelings* (verses 2, 3). In this

instance it appeals to the instinct of parental love, a love awakened and intensified by the immediate danger of a sick and dying child. The darling child is often snatched away as a warning to the family. As a solitary flower is more lovely because of the barrenness that surrounds it, and as a little light is heightened in brilliancy by its darkened background, so the simple piety of a child is all the more suggestive in its warning and teaching when discovered in the midst of prevalent iniquity. 3. *This warning is often given by the same person who has before uttered promises of good* (verse 4-6, comp. with xi. 29-39). Ahijah, who had before spoken words of promise and of hope, was commissioned to convey "heavy tidings" of coming judgment. This fact should have led Jeroboam to reflection, and to pause before he took the next fatal step to self-abandonment and ruin. The faithful minister must speak of judgment, as well as of mercy (1 Sam. xv. 26-28).

II. That Divine judgments are explicitly declared. 1. *The reasons for the Divine judgments are given* (verses 7-9). Jeroboam had been exalted with honour, power, and greatness, even to the detriment and humbling of the favourite tribe of Judah; and he had treated the gracious intentions of Jehovah with colossal ingratitude and unexampled impiety. Whatever idolatries the Israelites had been guilty of previously, whether in the earlier or the later times, by their worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, of the groves, of the gods of Syria, Moab, and Ammon (Judg. ii. 13; iii. 7; vi. 25; x. 6; 1 Kings xi. 33), yet hitherto none of their rulers had set up the idolatrous worship of ephods, teraphim, and the like (Judg. xviii. 17), as a substitute for the true religion, or sought to impose an idolatrous system on the nation. Gideon's ephod "*became* a snare contrarily to his intentions (Judg. viii. 27). Solomon's high places were private-built for the use of his wives, and not designed to attract the people. Jeroboam was the first ruler who set himself to turn the Israelites away from the true worship and establish a poor counterfeit of it, which he strove to make, and succeeded in making, the religion of the great mass of his subjects. Of all this, he is plainly reminded when the Divine judgments are declared against him. 2. *The nature of the Divine judgments is stated.* (1.) It is *personal* (verses 10-14). Jeroboam and his house shall be cut off. The prophet associates no dignity with any portion of Jeroboam's doomed house. He sees in it only the vile slave, or the slaughtered victim of Divine judgment, whether already a prisoner, or still fighting to keep free from the hands of the foe, or the lone few that may have escaped death during the siege. They suffer the horrible punishment threatened in the law to the impious transgressor (Deut. xxviii. 26), and the foulest indignity that a conquered and slaughtered foe could be exposed to (comp. v. 11, with 1 Sam. xvii. 46). He who transmits sin to his descendants involves them in the punishment connected with its continued commission. (2). It is *national* (verses 15, 16). Here is the first positive announcement of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles as a punishment of Israel's sins. Already, in earlier times, had a rooting up and scattering of the people been threatened in cases of disobedience (Deut. xxviii. 63; xxix. 27; Josh. xxiii. 16); but Ahijah is the first of that long line of prophets that hold up exile beyond the river Euphrates as a certainly coming woe. The people that share in a monarch's sin will inevitably share in its punishment. 3. *The agent of Divine judgments is mentioned* (verse 14). This king was Baasha; and we learn the fulfilment of the prophetic threat from chap. xv. 27-30. The agents of Divine vengeance are already stationed all down the lines of future human history.

III. That Divine judgments are inevitable (verses 17-20). Already the judgment had begun in the death of this innocent and pious son. Jeroboam soon followed, struck down by a dire disease which dragged him down to a miserable

death (2 Chron. xiii. 20). Destruction often overtakes sinners in the midst of their career. Death pays no more respect to palaces than to the clay-built hut. No power in earth or hell can avert the righteous punishment of wrong-doing.

LESSONS:—1. *Ruin is not far from a kingdom when righteousness is expelled and iniquity triumphant.* 2. *We cannot plead the examples of others, however high in office and power, to screen our sins from the Divine judgments.* 3. *A genuine repentance is the only protection against threatened judgments.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1-20. Jeroboam in need and in distress. I. He is only concerned about the taking away of the need and the lifting off of the punishment, not in the renunciation of his sin and the conversion of the heart, which should have been the result of his need, as it is the case now with so many. II. He seeks consolation and help, not at the hands of his false priests and spiritual hirelings, whom he himself did not trust, but from the prophet, about whom he did not trouble himself after he had nothing to ask. Thus it is always. In need and necessity unbelievers and the children of this world seek for consolation and comfort from a spiritual preacher, and despise the finery of the hirelings who care only for the wool, and not for the sheep. III. He does not himself apply to the prophet, because he has an evil conscience, and he sends his wife in a disguise, for before the world he does not wish to be viewed as one who cares much for prophets. This is the folly of the wise of this world, that they suppose they can deceive God as they deceive men. But the Lord sees what is concealed in the darkness, and gives to every one what he has deserved.—*Lange.*

1-16 The sight of the sick boy whom he cared for brought back, perhaps, the thought of himself when he had still youthful freshness and hope, when he felt the wrongs which Solomon was inflicting upon the land, and dreamed that he might be its deliverer. And with these thoughts would come the recollection of the man who had told him how, if he walked in right ways, God would make him a sure house. A sad and profitable reflection if he had paused to dwell upon it. But the lying habit of mind which he had contracted by converse with the priests of the high places only urged him to consider how he could bribe Ahijah to tell him something about the child which he would like to hear. This fragment of Ahijah's history marks out with much clearness the office of a prophet in Israel. Living under the brilliant government of Solomon, where all had the outward face of prosperity and continuance—living under the tyranny of Jeroboam, where all was new and revolutionary—he had still to say, "There is an eternal order which cannot be violated. Whosoever defies it will bring ruin upon himself and upon his house. God is; a power which sets Him at nought and substitutes changeable things in His place, cannot abide. It may be appointed to punish an evil which has been working secretly; it will last its hour; but it is doomed. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." The prophets could speak this word knowing it to be true. And they could speak another which was more terrible. They could say, "Israel must suffer for Jeroboam's sins. Not by an arbitrary decree, which punishes one for the crimes of another; but because the heart of the people has gone along with the ruler; because a ruler embodies it himself, and presents in open act the temper and spirit of those whom he rules; because if they would be saved from the consequences of his evil doings, they must turn to the everlasting King. This is an universal principle which comes out with fresh power in each stage of Jewish history. —*Maurice.*

Verses 1-6. Anxious forebodings. 1. Arise from a consciousness of wrong-doing. 2. Aggravated by family affliction. 3. Cannot be concealed by the cleverest disguise. 4. Are only too surely realised.

Verse 1. When the threatening, warning word of God bears no fruit, God at last sends the cross, especially the cross in the household, to humble us, to bring us to a knowledge of our sins, and to lead us to the cross of Christ. God generally lays hold upon men in those respects where it is mostly grievous to them (2 Sam. xii. 14; John iv. 47).—*Starke.*

Verses 2, 3. Extremity draws Jeroboam's thoughts to the prophet, whom else he had not cared to remember. Certainly his heart despised those base priests of his places; neither could he trust either to the gods or to the clergy of his own making; his conscience rests upon the fidelity of that man whose doctrine he had forsaken. How did the idolater strive against his own heart, while he inwardly despised those whom he professed to honour, and inwardly honoured them whom he professed to despise. Wicked breasts are false to themselves, neither trusting to their own choice, nor making choice of that which they may dare to trust. But, O! the gross folly mixed with the craft of wickedness. Could Jeroboam think that the prophet could know the event of his son's disease, and did he think he could not know his wife's disguise? The one was present, the other future; this was but wrapt up in a clout, that event was wrapt in the counsel of God; yet this politic head presumes that the greater shall be revealed, where the lesser shall be hid. There was never a wicked man that was not infatuate, and in nothing more than in those things wherein he hoped most to transcend the reach of others.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 2. Jeroboam did not wish to be seen having anything to do with the prophet by any one. Worldly people are ashamed to make it known that they believe in anything, even if it be a superstitious faith. If God send thee necessity and distress, take no bye-ways, but go to Him and pour out thine heart before Him; He hears all who call upon Him, all who earnestly cry unto Him. Disguise thyself, that no one mark who and what thou art. This is the bad advice which the world gives for the conduct of life, and which passes current with it as the true wisdom thereof. How social life is vitiated by this sin, by the endeavour to seem before people rather than to be—often it is like a masquerade! It is even more deceived by actions, by mien, and manner, than by words. The art of disguise corrupts man in the profoundest ground of his being, and transforms him into an incarnate lie. —*Lange.*

He would not have it known in Israel that his queen went on such an errand. It would show that neither his calves nor his self-made priests could help him in the time of trouble. His heart had become so infatuated and clouded by his false worship as to imagine that Jehovah's prophet might not detect his guile. He dared not meet the old prophet, but sent his wife, for a sense of his own sins admonished him that he deserved condemnation, and would receive it if he went in person to Ahijah.—*Whedon.*

Verses 3, 4. The little bit of faith which worldly people often exhibit is but part of their selfishness. The fore-knowledge of the future in the affairs of daily life man would gladly possess, because he will not yield himself in faith to the will of God. Hence flow often superstition, fortune-telling, dream interpretation, astrology, both among the heathens, as well as among Christians. The gift of God neither should nor can be sold or bought for money. As a rule, unbelief is bound with superstition. Jeroboam did not believe when God spoke to him by word and deed, and yet he believed that by means of a few loaves and cakes he could persuade God to reveal

the future to him. The history of religion in modern times confirms and illustrates this.—*Cramer.*

Verse 3. Henry well calls attention to the "notion of fatality" evinced in this enquiry of Jeroboam, and also in that of Ahaziah (2 Kings i. 2), and that of Benhadad (2 Kings viii. 8). They enquire simply what the end will be, not what means they should use for recovery.—*Whedon.*

Verses. 4-6. The wife of Jeroboam before the prophet. 1. She means to deceive the aged blind prophet by a disguise, but the Lord gives him sight (Ps. clvi. 8). He gives strength to the weary, and power to the feeble. The Lord ever gives sight to his true servants, so that the world cannot deceive and blind them. 2. She hopes, by her present, to secure the desired answer; but at the hour, the Lord gives him the word he shall speak. It is the spirit of God who speaks through him (Matt. x. 19). A true servant of God proclaims the word of truth to every one, without respect of persons, no matter how hard it be for him. This often is his hard but sacred duty.—*Lange.*

Verse. 4. Putting off her royal attire, and putting on more demure apparel, like as many hypocrites do, conforming themselves to the company they come into, and walking in a disguise till God detect them.—*Trapp.*

Verse. 6. The visions of Ahijah were inward; neither was his bodily sight more dusky than the eyes of his mind were clear and piercing. It was not the common light of men whereby he saw, but divine illumination; things absent, things future, were no less obvious to those spiritual beams, than present things are to us. Ere the quick eyes of that great lady can discern him, he hath espied her; and, so soon as he hears the sound of her feet, she hears from him the sound of her name, "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam." How God laughs in heaven at the frivolous fetches of crafty politicians, and when they think themselves most sure, shames them with a detection, with a defeat! What an idleness it is for foolish hypocrites to hope they can dance in a net, unseen of heaven.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 7-16. Woful tidings these for a mother's heart; and scarcely, perhaps, intelligible to her stunned intellect. Here was the beginning of judgment upon Jereboam and upon her, because she was his—judgment in taking away the only well-conditioned and worthy son; and judgment stored up in and for the ill-conditioned ones who were suffered to remain. God, when it suits the purpose of His wisdom and His justice, can afflict no less by what He spares than by what He takes. Yet there was mercy in this judgment—mercy, strange as it seems to say, to that amiable youth on whom the sentence of death was passed. It is so stated; and it is more intelligible than it seems. It was because there was some good thing found in him that he should die. Death was to be for him a reward, a blessing, a deliverance. He should die peaceably upon his bed; for him all Israel should mourn; for him many tears should be shed, and he should be brought with honour to his tomb; more than all, he would be taken from the evil that hung over his house; and the Lord's vindicatory justice would thus be spared the seeming harshness of bringing ruin upon a righteous king for his father's crimes. Alas! how little do we know the real objects of the various incidents of life and death—of mercy, of punishment, and of trial! In this case, the motives were disclosed, and we are suffered to glance upon some of the great secrets of death, which form the trying mysteries of life. With this instance in view, we can find the parallels of lives, full of hope and promise, prematurely taken, and that in mercy, as we can judge, to those who depart. The Heavenly Husbandman often gathers for his garner the fruit that early ripens, without suffering it to hang needlessly long, beaten by storms, upon the tree. Oh! how often, as many a

grieved heart can tell, do the Lord's best beloved die betimes—taken from the evil to come—while the unripe, the evil, the injurious, live long for mischief to themselves and others. Roses and lilies wither far sooner than thorns and thistles.—*Kitto.*

Verses 7-16. Terrible is that vengeance which God thunders against him by his prophet, whose passionate message upbraids him with his promotions, chargeth him with his sins, and, lastly, denounceth his judgments. No mouth was fitter to cast this royalty in the teeth of Jeroboam than that by which it was foretold, fore-promised; every circumstance of the advancement aggravates the sin. "I exalted thee;" thou couldst not rise to honour alone. "I exalted thee from among the people;" not from the peers, thy rank was but common before this rise. "I exalted thee from among the people, to be a prince;" subordinate height was not enough for thee; no seat would serve thee but a throne; "yea, to be a prince of my people Israel." No nation was for thee but my chosen one; none but my royal inheritance; neither did I raise thee into a vacant throne; a forlorn and forsaken principality might be thankless, but "I rent the kingdom from another for thy sake." Yea, from what other but the grandchild of David! Out of his hand did I wrest the sceptre, to give it into thine. O, what high favours doth God sometimes cast away upon unworthy subjects! How do His abused bounties double both their sin and judgment!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 9. Unexampled wickedness. Seen—1. In the basest ingratitude for great favours. 2. In the reckless abuse of great privileges. 3. In the persistent and defiant commission of great crimes. 4. In stolid indifference to the most awful warnings. 5. In the utter rejection of God. 6. Merits unexampled punishment.

Verses 10-15. Not a blessing, but a curse rests upon a house which turns its back upon the Lord and His commandments. And so, also, a people who forget the faith of their fathers lose all territory, are given up to all convulsions from within and from without, and go to destruction. Sin is the destruction of the people (Heb. x. 28-30).

Verse 11. Dogs are the chief scavengers of Oriental cities. Troops of dogs, more than half wild, scour the streets by night, clearing away all the offal and carrion they can find. The vulture in the country districts, assisted sometimes by kites and crows, does the work of the dog in towns.—*Rawlinson.*

— To be cast out unburied is no great matter, natural men slight it. There is little difference to lie eaten of beasts above ground, or of worms beneath; yet when foretold to a man as a judgment denounced from God, as against that king (Jer. xxii. 19), it hath its own weight, carrying some stamp of God's despising him; and though a man feels it not when it is done, yet he feels it looking on it beforehand, especially as threatened of God; sees himself, as it were, dragged about and torn.—*Leighton.*

— The ancient Medes are said to have thrown the bodies of their dying relatives to dogs, supposing it dishonourable to expire on their beds, or be deposited in the earth.—*Mavor.*

Verses 12, 13. The death of a beloved child, for whom God has prepared good, is often the only and the supreme means of turning away the heart of the parents from sin and the world, and of winning them to the life in God to which they are strangers. For many a child it is a Divine blessing when it is early taken out of this vain world, and called away from surroundings in which there is danger of the corruption both of soul and body.

Verse 13. Imperfect goodness. We are taught here—1. *That goodness may be partial and yet true.* 1. Abijah's goodness was *true.* (1). It was a "good thing in him." In whatever

particular acts his piety found manifestation, it sprang from his heart. (2). It was "a good thing *found* in him." The Hebrew word here used signifies "finding without seeking." In other words, his goodness was evident, manifest. (3). It was "a good thing *toward the Lord God of Israel*." True goodness springs from the love and fear of God. The goodness of the text was heart-felt, sincere, fruit-bearing, God-honouring goodness. Yet, (2) Abijah's goodness was *imperfect*. "*Some* good thing." This is not the fullest eulogy. Not like the eulogy of Job, Caleb, Nathaniel, &c. All the surroundings of Abijah were most unfortunate. The tender opening flower was surrounded by a vicious atmosphere; and no wonder that, in some respects, it lacked completeness; no wonder that some of its leaves bore the taint of mildew. A true disciple—he was a weak one; a bright light—he was not the brightest. II. *That real, but imperfect goodness is recognized and accepted by God.* God praised and rewarded the piety of the young prince. God cannot *overlook* imperfect goodness. The eye readily discovers that in which we delight; God loves goodness, and wherever it springs—in unlikely places, in unlikely hearts—God knows it. And He *accepts* it. Learn here: 1. *A lesson in judging of others.* We must be charitable—men may be true, and not perfect. The jewel may have a flaw, and yet be a jewel. 2. There is a solemn lesson in this subject for those *who, in most favourable circumstances, lack true goodness.* Abijah, in most unfavourable circumstances, was true and beautiful. And so there are ever such. With nothing to help them but the grace of God, they live pure, godly, noble lives. What shall be said of those who lack true goodness despite the fact that they have every help and encouragement? God is not a hard master; but He must condemn such. 3. A lesson of encouragement *for many who feel that with many failings they yet have the root of the matter in them.* Your flowers are half hidden in the weeds; but be of good comfort; aim at the highest, work for it, hope for it, and He shall not cast you out. —*W. L. Watkinson.*

— Dr. Kane, finding a flower under the Humbolt glacier, was more affected by it because it grew beneath the lip and cold bosom of the ice, than he would have been by the most gorgeous garden bloom. So some single struggling grace in the heart of one far removed from Divine influences may be dearer to God than a whole catalogue of virtues in the life of one more favoured of heaven.

— And let me tell you, that as it is a eulogy in any one to be good in a bad family, so it must proportionably be a horrid brand upon any one to be bad in a good family. It was thought fit to be put upon record, concerning Abijah, the son of Jeroboam, that "there was some good thing found in him;" good desires, good inclinations, even in so wicked a family, as Jeroboam's was. It is proportionably a horrid mark upon that person who continueth ungodly in a godly family; that is, a prayless wretch in a praying family; whose heart, at least, never prayeth, hath no desires after God; no contrition, no sense in the confession of sin; no love, no gratitude in the acknowledgment of mercy. For one to continue ungodly in a godly family, or to go out ungodly from a godly family, what a horrid thing will this be! How much of terror and amazement will it carry in it at last, when the case comes to open itself to view, and to be looked upon and considered in its proper and native aspect! And even as it now is, to think with oneself, "That such or such children or fellow-servants in a family where I may have lived a considerable time, may have had their hearts melted in hearing the Word read and applied, but mine was always hard; they have had their souls humbled in the acknowledgment of sin, but mine was unhumbled; they have had desires enlarged in seeking for mercy, but I had no desire after spiritual good." To live so in a good family, and to go out such from a good family. Oh! the horror of this case, and the reflections

it will cause in the close of time; or, if not so, in an eternity of misery that will never end!—*Howe.*

— If we would wish to discover whether there were any particles of steel in a large quantity of rubbish, it would not be the wisest way to search for them, and especially in the dark, but to hold a large and efficacious magnet over it. And this, if it be there, is the way to discover true religion in our souls. The truths and promises of God are, to a principle of religion in the mind, that which the magnet is to the steel; if there be any in us, the proper exhibition of the Gospel will ordinarily draw it forth.—*A. Fuller.*

Verse 16. **The fatal consequences of sin.** I. *Sin corrupts the individual the more it is committed.* "The sins of Jeroboam who did sin." II. *Is contagious in its nature and tyrannical in its rule.* "And made Israel to sin." III. *Involves a whole nation in degradation and ruin.* "And He shall give Israel up."

— To tempt and lead another into sin, is worse than to sin thyself. It shows sin to be of great growth in that man that doth it knowingly and willingly. Herbs and flowers do not shed their seed till ripe; creatures propagate not till they are of stature and age! What do those that tempt others, but diffuse their wicked opinions and practices, and, as it were, raise up seed to the devil, thereby to keep up the name of their infernal father in the world? This shows sin to be mighty in them indeed!—*Gurnall.*

— If the Lord say, he who offends *one* of the least of these (Matt. xviii. 6), what will He say to those who give offence to an entire people, at the head of which they stand, through unbelief and immorality, and beguile them into an apostasy from the living God?

Verse 17. Doleful were the tidings the disguised princess had to bear back to the beautiful town of Tirzah. All remoter griefs were probably to her swallowed up in this—which rung continually in her ears in all her homeward way—"When thy feet enter into the city the child shall die." It is heavy tidings to a mother that she must lose her well-beloved son; but it is a grievous aggravation of her trouble that she might not see him before she died. They who were about him knew not that he was to die to-day, and therefore could not estimate the preciousness of his last hours, and the privilege of being then near him, and of receiving his embrace. *She* knew: but she might not be near, nor pour out upon her dying son the fulness of a mother's heart. Knowing that her son lay on his death bed, her first impulse must have been to fly home to receive his dying kiss; but her second to linger by the way, as if to protract that dear life which must close the moment she entered the city. Never, surely, before or since, was a distressed mother so wofully torn between the antagonist impulses of her affection! At last her weary steps reached the city; and as she entered the gates her son died, and she was only in time to press to her arms the heart still warm, although it had ceased to beat.—*Kitto.*

Verse 18. **Sorrow for the dead.** 1. May melt the hardest heart. 2. Is profound and general at the grave of the good. 3. Does not always lead to the abandonment of sin.

— **A nation in mourning.** 1. A pathetic sight. 2. Shows an appreciation of a virtuous life in the midst of national corruption. 3. Affords an opportunity for making serious resolutions to live a truer life.

— Yet what a mixture is here of severity and favour in one act!—favour to the son, severity to the father: severity to the father, that he must lose such a son; favour to the son, that he shall be taken from such a father Jeroboam is wicked, and therefore he shall not enjoy an Abijah; Abijah hath some good things, therefore he shall be removed from the danger of the depravation of Jeroboam. The best are fittest for heaven, the earth is fittest for the worst; this is the

region of sin and misery, that of immortality. It is no argument of disfavour to be taken early from a well-led life, as not of approbation to age in sin.—*Bp. Hall*

Verses 19, 20. The Scripture says, the memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the godless will perish (Prov. x. 7). The first is true of David, the last of Jeroboam, whose name is not like an ointment pouring out diffusing sweet perfume (Eccles. i. 3), but is a savour of death unto death; for with his name, for all the future, this word is connected, "Who sinned, and made Israel to sin." Of what use is it to have worn a worldly crown two-and-twenty years, to have striven and fought for it, when the crown of life does not succeed it, which they alone obtain who are faithful unto death! (Rev. ii. 10).—*Lange.*

Verse 20. He lay down. "This shall ye have of my hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow" (Isa. l. 11). He died not the common death of all men, but by some remarkable stroke: beside the loss of five hundred thousand of his men in one battle with Ahijah king of Judah (2 Chron. xiii. 17-20).

— The details of Jeroboam's end are lost to us. It is overclouded by unsuccessful wars with Judah, by wasting illness, and by the violent convulsion in which his remains, and those of his children, were torn from their sepulchres. To observe clearly wherein his sins consisted, is to observe the moral of the whole part of the history. It was not that he had revolted against the house of Judah, for this, according to the narrative, had been put upon him by the direct providence and sanction of God. Nor that he had fallen into idolatry. This was the sin of Solomon and Rehoboam, against which his whole life was a perpetual protest. It was that to secure certain good ends, he adopted doubtful and dangerous means. The anticipations of the prophets concerning him had been frustrated. Like the apostolic Las Casas, in the sad history of South America, they saw with bitter grief the failure of the institution which they had fostered, and from which they had hoped so much. It is this reflection which gives a keenness of regret to the epithet so many times repeated, "The sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." To keep the first commandment, he broke the second; to preserve the belief in the unity of God, he broke the unity and tampered with the spiritual conception of the national worship. The ancient sanctity of Dan and Bethel, the time-honoured Egyptian sanction of the Sacred Calf, were mighty precedents; the Golden Image was doubtless intended as a likeness of the one true God. But the mere fact of setting up such a likeness broke down the sacred awe which had hitherto marked the Divine presence, and accustomed the minds of the Israelites to the very sin against which the new form was intended to be a safeguard. From worshipping God under a false and unauthorized form, they gradually learnt to worship other gods altogether, and the venerable sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel prepared the way for the temples of Ashtaroth and Baal at Samaria and Jezreel; and the religion of the kingdom of Israel at last sank lower even than that of the kingdom of Judah, against which it had revolted. "The sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat," is the sin again and again repeated in the policy, half worldly, half religious, which has prevailed through large tracts of ecclesiastical history. Many are the forms of worship in the Christian Church which, with high pretensions, have been nothing else but "so many various and opposite ways of breaking the second commandment." Many a time has the end been held to justify the means; and the Divine character been degraded by the pretence or even the sincere intention of upholding His cause: for the sake of secular aggrandisement; for the sake of binding together good systems, which, it was feared, would otherwise fall to pieces; for the sake of supporting the faith of the multitude, from the fear lest they should fall away to rival

sects, or lest the enemy should come and take away their place and nation, false arguments have been used in support of religious truth, false miracles promulgated or tolerated, false readings in the sacred text defended. And so the faith of mankind has been undermined by the very means intended to preserve it. The whole subsequent history is a record of the mode by which, with the best intentions, a church and nation may be corrupted.—*Stanley.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 21-31.

IDOLATRY AS A CAUSE OF NATIONAL DECAY.

I. That idolatry is a degradation to the holiest place. "Jerusalem, the city which the Lord did choose out of all the tribes of Israel to put His name there" (verse 21). The spot was hallowed as the dwelling-place of Jehovah and by manifold revelations of His glory. It was no slight degradation that this holy city should be debased by the idolatrous rites of the heathen. Idolatry pollutes everything it touches. "There was no visible church upon earth but here; and this what a one! O God, how low dost thou sometimes suffer thine own flock to be driven! what woful wanes and eclipses hast thou ordained for this heavenly body. But the gloomy times of corruption shall not last always, the light of truth and peace shall at length break out, and bless the sad hearts of the righteous."

II. That idolatry is the originator and patron of the most abominable vices. 1. *It corrupts a whole nation.* "And *Judah* did evil above all that their fathers had done" (verses 22, 23). It is no longer the individual monarch who is blamed, but the people; the evil practices have become national. One sinner destroyeth much good; one false officer may corrupt an entire army; an idolatrous king is a curse to a country. The mother of Rehoboam was an Ammonitess (verse 21), a bad wife for a king of Israel; and her son soon partook more of the temper of Ammon, the idolater, than of the spirit of Abraham. 2. *It sanctions the most abominable vices* (verse 24). What a strange incongruity is this—Sodom in Jerusalem! idols in Judah! Surely debauched profession proves desperate; admit the idols, you cannot doubt of the sodomy. If they have changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things, it is no marvel if God gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves. They dishonoured God by one sin, and God left them to dishonour themselves by another. The most outrageous sins have been committed under the sanction of idolatrous worship. 3. *It is specially offensive to God.* "They provoked Him to jealousy with their sins" (verse 22). This expression is a metaphor which views the relation of God and His people as the marriage covenant, in which the people are represented as a faithless wife. No act of infidelity can be so secret as to elude the eyes of God. "Judah did evil *in the sight* of the Lord." What emotions must arise in the heart of God as He is a silent and invisible Spectator of the sins of His people!

III. That idolatry destroys the bravery of a nation. 1. *It is powerless to repel the invasion of an enemy* (verse 25). It may be that Jeroboam incited the Egyptian king to make war against Judah; but it is a revelation of the condition of weakness into which the kingdom had sunk that Jeroboam saw his rival would become an easy prey to the Egyptian army. How great a change was this to the vigour and bravery of the days of David, when the surround-

ing nations were kept in awe by his victorious sword, and the Jewish kingdom acquired the position of a first-rate military power! Idolatry emasculates the manhood of a people, and it becomes demoralized and cowed in the presence of an enemy which before it had confronted with bravery. 2. *It reduces a nation to poverty* (verses 26-28). Religion promotes the wealth of a nation and guards it from spoliation. While Rehoboam and his people walked in the fear of God (2 Chron. xi. 17), the accumulated riches of Solomon remained undisturbed; but when they forsook the Lord (*ib.* xii. 1), then Shishak, the instrument of Divine retribution, was permitted to invade Jerusalem and carry away its immense treasures. And now, instead of the golden shields which glittered in the presence of Solomon on great state occasions, Rehoboam is glad enough to substitute brass—an emblem of the degeneracy of Judah. How soon the mention of the profusion of gold in the age of Solomon is succeeded by this mention of brass in its place! Such are the evanescent vanities of this world's riches! Idolatry will bring the most prosperous nation to beggary.

IV. That idolatry is a fruitful source of fraternal enmity. "There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days" (verse 30). Not merely a feeling of hostility, but frequent wars. We are not to suppose that the Word of the Lord by Shemaiah (xii. 24) was any more observed in the later history of Rehoboam than it was by his sons. Of all quarrels, those between people of near kindred are the most bitter and disastrous. Where true religion is ignored, the bond of unity and brotherhood is destroyed. Idolatry encourages a restless strife after an unholy and tyrannical supremacy, rather than contends for the honour of God and the supreme authority of His law.

V. That idolatry hurries its votaries to an untimely and dishonoured grave (verse 31). Brief as was the reign of Rehoboam, that of his son and successor was briefer still (chap. xv 2). Sin shortens human life, robs it of many pleasures, and surrounds its close with gloom and misery. Even the pious are impressed with the brevity of life. "Alas!" was the touching lament of Grotius, "I have lost my life in doing nothing with great labour!" What can be said of the close of a life wasted in folly and in wicked opposition to God?

LESSONS:—1. *Religion is the secret of a nation's greatness.* 2. *No nation can prosper when it forsakes God.* 3. *There is no limit to the abominations of a nation when it gives itself up to idolatry.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 21-30. The deep fall of Judah. I. Whence it came (Deut. xxxii. 15; Hosea xiii. 6; Prov. xxx. 9). II. Whither it led (Rom. i. 25 28). Amongst individual men, as in entire communities, cities, and nations, revolt against the living God results from haughtiness, over-prosperity, and carnal security, bringing, as inevitable consequences, poverty, ruin, and misfortune in war. High as stood Judah under David and Solomon, so deep in proportion did it sink under Rehoboam.—*Lange.*

Verses 21, 22. Wherever God has a house, the Devil always builds a chapel close at hand. How often does it happen that cities and countries, whence it has been ordained by God that the light of His knowledge should shine forth, have become the seat alike of superstition and of scepticism, and thus infinitely sink below the level of those lands which have never heard His blessed Word.

Verse 22. **The enormity of sin.** I. Is not unnoticed by the Omniscient

One. It is committed "in the sight of God." II. Is a trial to the love of God. "They provoked Him to jealousy with their sins." III. Is a flagrant evidence of faithlessness to the Divine Covenant. IV. Earns an unenviable notoriety. "Above all that their fathers had done."

— Idolatry and immorality rather increased than decreased, and the fall of Judah seems to have been even deeper than that of Israel. However, the condition of Judah was not so bad as the condition of Israel in this respect; as in the latter the breach of the fundamental law had become the state religion and institution of the kingdom, the separate existence of which depended on the new worship; whilst in Judah the apostasy was only permitted, and the lawful worship of Jehovah had always a firm footing at the central sanctuary. Many good elements also still existed in Judah (2 Chron. xx. 12). Judah always repented as often as they fell into idolatry, and they continued to be the guardian of the law; whilst Israel, on the contrary, never completely returned to the right way.—*Lange.*

Verses 23. 24. Wherever profligacy and fornication are in the ascendant, there is true heathendom, how many soever may be the churches. King Rehoboam, too, sinned grievously in this wise he, although not himself an idol-worshipper, yet failed as a servant of God, in that he did not oppose idol worship with all his might, and even regarded it as having equal rights with the service of the true God—even, alas! as we find Christian sovereigns who permit unbelief and revolt from the truth to rank upon a level with faith and confession of God in Christ.—*Ibid.*

Verse 23. One great object of the Mosaic dispensation was to maintain, in the persons of the Israelites, a living testimony against the polytheism which had overspread the nations; and whatever might directly or indirectly tend to the worship of many gods, or to the associating of other gods of man's devising with the only real God, Jehovah, the Creator of heaven and earth, was carefully guarded against and discouraged. When, in process of time, the high places and groves of primitive worship became consecrated to divers idols, the danger was that, in adopting the use of them, the Israelites should retain some lingering recollection of the God to whom they had been set apart; and this, gathering strength, would insensibly lead them into idolatry, and to the association of other gods with Jehovah.—*Kitto.*

Verse 25. Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together (Matt. xxiv. 28). The chastisements of God are never delayed where immorality and godlessness prevail, but they do not always lead, as with Judah, to the humble confession, "The Lord is righteous" (2 Chron. xii. 6). Sovereigns are often only the instruments of God in their undertakings, although they do not or will not recognize the fact.—*Calwer.*

— So long as Rehoboam continued in a right course, the king of Egypt was restrained by the Lord from the measures he contemplated; but no sooner had the king, with his people, sinned against Jehovah, than the hands of this powerful prince were loosened, and he proceeded to invade the land with a mighty host. This was the first time the Egyptians had appeared in the sacred land with hostile purposes against the Hebrews; and it is probable that so formidable a body of chariots, horsemen, and infantry had never before invaded the country. The appearance of this new enemy, whose power and resources they well knew, must have filled the Judahites with dread—the rather, as their unfaithfulness had disentitled them to the right of looking to the Lord for his protection.—*Kitto.*

Verse 26. The true treasures of the Temple are the worship of God in spirit and in truth, prayer, faith, love,

and obedience: these no thieves nor robbers can steal, and without them all the gold and silver in temples and churches is vain and empty show. Golden or copper shields are alike in value if only we can say: "The Lord is our shield, and the Holy One of Israel our King."

Verses 27, 28. The pride of poverty. I. Descends to paltry imitations. II. Delights in pompous parade. III. Exaggerates the value of what it possesses.

— It is better to pray to our Heavenly Father in our closet, rather than to worship with pomp in church to be seen by men. Yet now there are many who ceremoniously frequent the churches, but neglect to maintain the fear of God, discipline, and good morals in their own houses and neighbourhood.

Verses 30, 31. It is not to a man's honour when, at his grave, these words are said: There was life-long enmity between him and his neighbour.—*Lange.*

Verse 30. Jealousy a fruitful source of mischief. I. Engenders hatred among the nearest kindred. II. Is the cause of the most horrible wars. III. Is very difficult to allay.

Verse 31. We are not to conclude that Rehoboam himself served idols; on the contrary, it is emphatically said, that in solemn procession, accompanied by his whole body-guard, he continually visited the Temple, and thus showed himself publicly to the people as a worshipper of Jehovah. But he forsook the law in so far that he did not obey its injunctions; he suffered idolatrous worship in Jerusalem, and did nothing towards exterminating it. This was the evil he was accused of: he continued Jehovah's servant, but he wanted firmness and decision. Sometimes fiery and arrogant, sometimes yielding and weak, he was unstable, as he had shown himself in Shechem at the commencement of his reign. He seems also to have been under the influence of his idolatrous mother (verse 31), and wife (chap. xv. 13), and of his many wives (2 Chron. xi. 21).—*Lange.*

CHAPTER XV.

THE REIGNS OF ABIJAM, ASA, NADAB, AND BAASHA.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Abijam**—Original form of his name was Abijah (2 Chron. xii. 16), the sacred terminal "*jah*" being connected therewith. But, probably on account of his evil reign, his name was altered to Abijam. Verse 2. **Maachah, daughter of Abishalom**—*i.e.*, Michaiah, daughter of Absalom; more properly, *granddaughter* of Absalom, by Uriel and *Tamar*, who was Absalom's daughter (*vide* 2 Chron. xiii. 2). Verse 4. **Give him a lamp in Jerusalem**—An Oriental figure of speech. Having a lamp in the house indicates the continuance of the family name. Verse 6. **And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, &c.**—*i.e.*, rancorous rivalry, and consequent frequent border skirmishes. A mistake to think that "Rehoboam" is a scribe's blunder for *Abijam*, as given in end of verse 7. The feudal antagonism is reasserted here, having been already stated in chap. xiv. 20. The two records respecting Rehoboam (verse 6) and Abijam (verse 7) simply denote that the hostile feeling between Israel and Judah continued through the reigns of both father and son. Verse 12. **The sodomites**—*vide* Notes on xiv. 24. **All the idols**—גִּלּוּלִים, a word for despicable things. The Rabbins render it mud-gods; *Ewald* renders it doll-images; *Gesenius*, idol-blocks. Verse 13. **An idol in a grove**—This is a word of far different meaning from that in verse 12. מִפְלֶצֶת means *horrendum*, as from the verb פלץ, to *terrify, horrify*. It is conjectured that this was an obscene figure, a *phallus*-image, a symbol of the productive powers of nature, specially (according to the Rabbins) revolting to the Hebrews. "*In a grove*," may read, *unto Asherah*; but this "grove" was one of similar scenes of licentious indulgence

practised in the name of religion. **Verse 17. Baasha, king of Israel**—Third sovereign of the kingdom of Israel, son of Ahijah, probably of lowly origin (chap. xvi. 2). **Built Ramah**—In the tribal territory of Benjamin, about six miles (Roman) from and on the highway to Jerusalem, thereby cutting off king Asa's communication with the north. **Verse 18. All the silver, &c., left in the treasures**—Shishak had "*left*" but little (chap. xiv. 26); indeed, he "took away *all*." So that the הַנּוֹתָרִים, *the remainder*, means what Asa had placed therein; τὸ εὑρεθὲν, as the *Sept.* gives it, *what he found*. **Verse 20. With all Naphtali**—Or, *unto* the land of Naphtali. **Verse 22. Made a proclamation throughout**—or, *called together*. **None excepted**—The *Septuagint* has misapprehended the adverbial sense of אֵין נָקִי, "none excepted," and given it as a proper name—εἰς Ἐναείμ. **Verse 27. Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines**—A town given to the Levites (Josh. xix. 44), situate within the tribe of Dan. **Verse 29. Smote all the house of Jeroboam**—*Vide* Notes on chap. xiv. verses 10 and 14. Customary in Oriental scenes for usurpers to exterminate all rivals to the throne. But hereby was fulfilled Ahijah's prophecy. **Left not any that breathed**—A more inclusive description than in xiv. 10, for this embraces both male and female. **Verse 31. Now the rest of the acts, &c.**—The historian cares not to write them; he aimed not to preserve a detailed record of the reigns and deeds of kings; all he set himself to do was to show the conduct of kings in reference to Jehovah and His worship, and the condign punishment which overtook defiance of the theocratic law; thereby tracing the fact that "*sin*" (verse 26), in the odious form of national apostasy, wrought the overthrow of the Israelitish dynasties, until the kingdom of Israel itself perished.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-8.

The Permanent Influence of a Good Example.

1. That a good example is acquired by a life of obedience to the Divine commandments. "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life" (verse 5). David became the pattern and model to all kings of right conduct towards Jehovah. Great and many as were his defects and failures, he was never guilty of idolatry, nor did he permit it to exist under his rule. A good example is not formed by aiming at it as a distinct object, but by quietly and faithfully doing the duty of the moment, without reference to ulterior results. The beautiful is unconscious of its own beauty, the sublime knows not its own sublimity; so the obedient and the good are unconscious of the impressions made by their upright example. It is always safest and best to obey God.

2. That a good example may be marred by serious blemishes. "Save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (verse 6). This was David's great crying offence, which drew down on him the judgments of God, and is ever mentioned to his shame. But he was guilty of other sins: as the neglect to properly disciplining his sons, the primal cause of Absalom's and Adonijah's ruin; his falsehoods before Achish (1 Sam. xxvii. 10); and his sin in numbering the people (2 Sam. xxiv. 10). But all these are, in comparison with his guilt in adultery with Bathsheba and in the murder of Uriah, as sins of infirmity and ignorance. Lange points out that "the sin of David against Uriah was great indeed, but, apart from the fact that he repented of it bitterly, it was not one which broke the fundamental law of the theocracy, the covenant and its chief commandment, and it did not, therefore, undermine the foundation of the Israelite nationality." David is not held up as a *perfect* example of goodness; it is only the Sinless One who can be so considered. How often does it happen that in great natures, great virtues and great vices are unhappily commingled! Their sins are beacons to warn; their virtues indicate the possibilities of goodness to which human nature may rise.

III. That a good example is not always imitated. 1. *Because of the feebleness of the religious principle.* His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father" (verse 3). Yet Abijam prepared precious offerings for the temple service (verse 15), probably to replace vessels which Shishak had carried off, and in his war with Jeroboam professed himself a faithful servant of Jehovah (2 Chron. xiii. 10-12). Many boast of their profession of godliness who are strangers to the power of it, and plead the truth of their religion who yet are not true to it. He seemed to have zeal for the worship of Jehovah, but he lacked sincerity: he still sanctioned idolatry. In order to have the courage to follow a good example, we must have deep and forceful religious convictions: these are to the soul what the ballast and the driving power are to the steamship. What is wanted is a strong, deep, faith-compelling conviction of the awful truth and saving power of the Divine Word.

2. *Because of the demoralizing influence of a bad example.* "He walked in all the sins of his father which he had done before him" (verse 3). It is easier to copy a bad example than a good one, especially when bad examples are abundant and are continually before us, and when good examples are so rare. Amid the prevalent idolatry of Israel there was only one Abijah in whom was "found some good toward the Lord God of Israel." Iniquity is a common weed: goodness is an exotic. One evil example has many imitators, and its pernicious influence is long continued. It aggravates the sin of a degenerate seed that they fare the better for the piety of their ancestors, and owe their blessings to it, and yet will not imitate it.

IV. That the influence of a good example is a permanent blessing to a nation (verse 4, comp. with ch. xi. 36). For David's sake, Jehovah did not utterly abandon Jerusalem, but, from time to time, provided a successor to the throne who should be as a light in the midst of surrounding darkness. Asa, the immediate successor of Abijam, was such a light. It was a promise made to David that his house should be made a perpetual light (Psa. xviii. 28; cxxxii. 17); and the history of God's people records the fulfilment of the promise, notwithstanding much individual unfaithfulness and sin. The influence of a good man is immortal.

LESSONS:—1. *Every facility is provided for living a holy life.* 2. *A pious ancestry entails great blessing and great responsibility.* 3. *A good example does not always restrain from flagrant sins.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-8. The fruit falls not far from the tree. What the old sing, the young chirp. The parental house is, for the child, the preparatory school of life; what he there sees and hears is never forgotten through life. No example is so weighty and important as that of the parents. How great, then, is their responsibility! Abijam followed not after the example of David, great and glorious as it was; but after that of his father Rehoboam, which he saw immediately before him.—*Lange.*

The throne of David oft changeth the possessors, and more complaineth of their iniquity than their remove. Abijam inherits the sins of his father Rehoboam, no less than his crown; and so spends his three years as if he had been no whit of kin to his grandfather's virtues. It is no news that grace is not traduced, while vice is: therefore is his reign short, because it is wicked. It was a sad case when both the kings of Judah and Israel, though enemies, yet conspired in sin. Rehoboam, like his father Solomon, began graciously,

but fell to idolatry; as he followed his father, so his son, so his people, followed him. Oh! what a face of a church was here when Israel worshipped Jeroboam's calves, when Judah built them high places, and images, and groves on every high hill, and under every green tree! On both hands God is forsaken, His temple neglected, His worship adulterate, and this not for some short brunt, but during the succession of two kings: for, after the first three years, Rehoboam changed his father's religion, as his shields, from gold to brass; the rest of his seventeen years were led in impiety. His son Abijam trod in the same miry steps, and Judah with them both. If there were any (and doubtless there were some) faithful hearts yet remaining in both kingdoms during these heavy times, what a corrosive it must needs have been to them to see so deplored and miserable a depravation!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 4. The idolatry of Abijam deserved the same punishment as that of Jeroboam (ch. xiv. 10-14), of Baasha (ch. xvi. 2-4), or of Zimri (*ib.* verse 19), the cutting off of his seed and transfer of the crown to another family. That these consequences do not follow in the kingdom of Judah is owing to the faithfulness of David, which brings a blessing on his posterity. Certainly, few things are more remarkable and more difficult to account for, or more ground of human reason, than the stability of the succession in Judah, and its excessive instability in the sister kingdom. One family in Judah holds the throne from first to last, during a space but little short of four centuries; while in Israel there are nine changes of dynasty within two hundred and fifty years.—*Speaker's Comm.*

—The blessing of pious, God-fearing forefathers often falls to the advantage of even degenerate children, through the mercy of God.

Verse 5. No human example, however glorious it may be, is perfect, for even the greatest and best are wanting in the sight of God, and miserable sinners. Therefore, we are referred to the example of Him who alone is sinless, and out of whose mouth proceeds no guile. He alone can say: "He who follows Me walketh not in darkness, but has the Light of Life" (1 Pet. ii. 21; John viii. 12). The children of this world often quote and excuse their sins by citing the example of good and holy men who have fallen, but never take pattern after their repentance and humiliation, and refuse to know anything of the wrong and smitten heart of a David (Psa. li. 19), or of the tears of a Peter (Matt. xxvi. 75).—*Lange.*

Verses 6-8. The enmity, strife, and war between the sister-kingdoms was the result of their broken covenant with the Lord God. Wheresoever, be it amid a nation, a community, or a family, the fear of the living God and the bond of union with Him is destroyed, there will ever be strife and discord; peace is only to be found where the God of peace reigns in the heart (Col. iii. 15). To go out of the world at enmity is not a blessed death.—*Ibid.*

Verse 7. Sharp wars by a just hand of God upon both those kingdoms for their idolatry. And for like cause the dissensions between England and Scotland consumed more Christian blood, wrought more spoil and destruction, and continued longer than ever quarrel we read of did between any two people of the world.—*Trapp.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 9-15.

Religious Reform.

I. That religious reform is a commendable work, in which even a monarch may engage. As the evil which had debased the nation originated from the throne, it was fitting that the remedy should issue from the same potent

source. Asa was the first monarch who made a bold and determined stand against the prevalent idolatry. The sin of the nation had grown into colossal proportions, and it required no ordinary courage and strength of will to attack it. Asa threw all the authority of the crown on the side of reform, and was himself the zealous leader of the movement. The king can do himself no greater honour, nor confer upon his people a greater good, than by making the interests of true religion his chief care. If persons in the highest rank refuse to use their influence in the removal of acknowledged abuses, the Lord will raise from obscurity an agent who will faithfully and effectually do the work. The humble peasant may be raised up to rebuke the careless and unfaithful monarch.

II. That religious reform is inspired by a desire to do the right. "Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord; his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days" (verse 11, comp. with verse 14). The need of reform is suggested by the wide divergence observed in the actual state of things from the inner consciousness of right. The man who studies the law of God, and conscientiously strives to keep its commandments, cannot fail to have a sense of what is right; and this sense of right will be the guide and inspiration of all his actions. This was the case with Asa, though the standard of perfection by which we are to measure the perfect ones of the Old Testament history is not the fulness of spiritual light and religious attainment which is set before us in the New Testament. It is rather a singleness and earnestness of pious purpose to obey God and maintain the honour of His name and worship. "All these were noble and excellent acts," writes Bishop Hall concerning the reform of Asa: "but that which gives true life unto all these is a sound root. 'Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.' No less laudable works than these have proceeded from hypocrisy, which, while they have carried away applause from men, have lost their thanks with God. All Asa's gold was but dross to his pure intentions." Holiness—a perfect heart towards God—is the strongest motive to work, and imparts a courage which no difficulties can daunt.

III. That religious reform aims at the suppression of the most glaring forms of public vice. 1. *It uproots gross immorality* (verse 12). In a time of reformation the most flagrant abominations are the first to fall; the rising tide of righteous indignation sweeps them away. No prince or people can prosper while the festering pest-houses of immorality are suffered to exist. 2. *It destroys idolatry* (verses 12, 13). Asa removed all the idols, demolished their temples, and devastated their groves; and doubtless many of the idol worshippers would take part in this work of destruction. When the mind is once undeceived, its anger against the instrument of its deception is sometimes terrific and unbounded. During the tyranny of the Spanish Inquisition in the Netherlands, in the sixteenth century, a spirit of fury suddenly arose in Antwerp and elsewhere against the images used in the Romish worship: the cathedrals and churches were dismantled, the images and religious relics broken to shivers, and yet not a single coin of the church treasures was appropriated; the destructive mania was wholly confined to objects of idolatrous worship. Terrible, indeed, is the vengeance which will, ere long, overtake the idols and their worshippers (Isa. ii. 18). 3. *It purifies the court* (verse 13). Maachah was deposed from being queen-mother because of her idolatry, and the disgusting image to which she did homage was burnt, and its ashes cast into the river. "The idols which his fathers had made" were all destroyed. All respect for flesh and blood must be subservient to the duty we owe to God. A good king who would promote religion among his subjects must begin by discountenancing all wickedness at court. A pure court is a great safeguard to a nation.

IV. That religious reform is not always thorough and complete. "But the high places were not removed" (verse 14): such as were set up for the worship of God; for as for those that were set up in honour of idols, he removed them. But he should have done both, as did afterwards zealous Hezekiah and Josiah. It is with the saints as with Jonathan's signal arrows, two fell short, and but one beyond the mark; so where one shooteth home to the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus, many fall short.—*Trapp.* Reformation often proceeds slowly and under great difficulties. It may leave untouched institutions that may become a snare and a source of corruption to future generations. Vested interests in a superstitious system are hard to slay.

V. That religious reform enriches the temple of God (verse 15). The practical evidence of a genuine reformation is shown in costly free-willing offerings to God. The true riches of a temple are not the silver and gold and superb furniture, but the gratitude, praise, and devotion of which these are but the outward manifestations. The soul is only rich in what it really lays up in the treasury of God. We must not only cast away the idols of our iniquity, but cheerfully dedicate ourselves and our substance to the cause and glory of God.

LESSONS:—1. *Abuses will creep into the best organized religious systems.* 2. *The work of the reformer is one of great sacrifice and labour.* 3. *The monarch who is zealous for religious reform deserves the gratitude and support of his people.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 11. It is to be regarded as a merciful providence of God, when a son who has grown up with evil surroundings and the bad example of a father and mother, yet holds steadily to His word and commandments, and resists firmly all ungodly influences.

— **The standard of right.** I. Is the will of God. II. By it every act of man is unerringly estimated. III. Is but imperfectly represented by the best human examples.

— In vain should he have hoped to restore God to his kingdom, while these abominations inhabited it. It is justly the main care of worthy and religious princes to clear their coasts of the foullest sins. O, the impartial zeal of Asa! There were idols that challenged a prerogative of favour, the idols that his father had made. All these he defaces: the name of a father cannot protect an idol; the duty to his parent cannot win him to a liking, to a forbearance of his misdevotion: yea, so much the more doth the heart of Asa rise against these puppets for that they were the sin, the shame of his father. He doth not more honour a father than hate an idol. No dearness of person should take off the edge of our detestation of the sin.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 12, 13. Against sins of licentiousness no authority can be powerful enough, for where this evil has crept in, there comes a moral corruption which works destructively upon all relations of life. Authority being ordained of God, as the Apostle says, its duty and task is to oppose with severity all godless conduct, without fear or favour of man, and to vindicate the eternal Divine laws. Therefore it is that we have the church prayer for those in authority.—*Lange.*

Verse 13. There can be no *queen-consort* where there is more than one wife; and in the East, where there is no more than one, she is not a *queen*, she is simply the *Zan-i-shah*, the king's wife—that is all. There is, however, in most cases, some one in the harem who, on one account or other, is recognised as the chief lady. There was one whose claim to be chief lady, or

queen, was superior to all others, and that was the MOTHER of the king. The prevalent usage of the East assigns the first rank in every household, not to the wife of the master, but to his mother, to whom the wife merely becomes another daughter. And so the rank of the king's mother was the nearest approach to the rank and dignity of a non-regnant queen. —*Kitto.*

— Nature is worthy of forgetfulness and contempt in opposition to the God of nature: upon the same ground as Asa removed the idols of his father Abijam, so for idols he removed his grandmother Maachah. She would not be removed from her obscene idols; she is therefore removed from the station of her honour. If all the world had been an idolater, he knew how little that precedent could avail for disobedience. Practice must be corrected by law, and not the law yield to practice. Maachah, therefore, goes down from her seat, her idols from their grove; she to retiredness, they to the fire, and from thence to the water. Woeful deities that could both burn and drown!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 12-15. **True reformation.** 1. Is wrought for the divine glory. 2. Is not to be hindered by family considerations. 3. Should be national in its progress and results. 4. Should destroy every vestige of corruption. 5. Is evidenced by practical generosity.

Verse 14. To remove deep-rooted and long-standing evils suddenly and completely is impossible, even for a well-intentioned and powerful ruler; for in that case he would bring about resistance to the good rather than further it.

— Yet, in 2 Chron. xiv. 3, we read that Asa "took away the altars of the strange gods and the high places," and in verse 5 that "he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images," which would seem at first sight to imply that he entirely put down the worship. The author of Chronicles, however, himself afterwards allows that "the high places were not taken away out of Israel," though the heart of Asa was perfect all his days. The explanation would seem to be, either that the idolatry was at one time put down, but crept back afterwards; or that, while Asa endeavoured to sweep it wholly away, his subjects would not be controlled, but found a means of maintaining it in some places—not, perhaps, in the cities, but in remote country districts, where the royal authority was weaker, and secresy more practicable.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 15. Hence noble and pious princes should bethink themselves of using their gold and silver, not only for worldly objects, but to enrich churches and schools, necessary to the accomplishment of godly designs.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 16—24.

SYMPTOMS OF RELIGIOUS REACTION.

I. Seen in a growing distrust of the protecting power of God. The building of a fortress by his rival Baasha, which would have the effect of interrupting a free and open intercourse with his capital, filled Asa with fear; and instead of putting his trust in that God whom he had so zealously served, he relied on his own crooked and short-sighted policy. He bribed the king of Syria to break the league existing between his own kingdom and the two rival Jewish kingdoms, so that Baasha was compelled to abandon the building of Ramah, and Asa used the stones for the fortifying of his own cities (verses 17-22). "O, what great and many infirmities may consist with uprightness! what alloys of imperfection will there be found in the most refined soul! Asa doth not only employ the Syrian, but relies on him, relies not on God: a confidence less sinful cost his grandfather David dear." Religion is losing its influence

over the soul when man is trusted more than God. A dishonest and wicked project may succeed, but the success is always embittered sooner or later. It is a dangerous thing to be too clever.

II. Seen in the misappropriation of consecrated treasure (verse 18). It is sad to notice that he who so recently dedicated these spoils to the Lord should make such use of them as is here described. Only on extraordinary occasions was the king justified in employing the temple treasures; but it was downright sacrilege for Asa to use them in bribing a foreign and heathen king, for whose help there was no urgent necessity. "What is bestowed in faith must be regarded as sacred, and under no pretext must it be diverted to worldly purposes. Nothing but a rude power, knowing neither fear nor awe of God, could commit such a robbery, and no blessing can ever rest upon it. He who gives with one hand, and takes back with the other, has his just recompense therein." The money power of the world is largely in the hands of the Christian church, and there is an immense responsibility resting upon the wealthy members of that church as to the righteous use of their riches. They are but stewards, and that only for a brief space, when they will be called to render an account of their stewardship to God. Indifference to financial responsibilities is a sure token of religious decay.

III. Seen in the disrespect and cruelty shown towards God's faithful messengers (2 Chron. xvi. 7-10). An important incident in the life of Asa, omitted by the writer of Kings, is supplied by the author of Chronicles. Hanani, the seer, was sent to rebuke and threaten the king for his sin in forsaking the Lord and in relying upon the Syrian for aid. To be thus chided and exposed when his diplomatic policy had seemed to prosper so well, was more than one so little used to contradiction could bear, and in his rage he thrust the too faithful prophet into prison, adding to his original fault the grievous sin of persecuting an inspired messenger of Jehovah. "Here we have the melancholy spectacle of a prophet of God imprisoned, not by an idolatrous or notoriously wicked king, but by one who has hitherto borne a noble character, and whose heart was substantially right with God. Not so did David receive Nathan's more stern rebuke. This descendant of his does that for only attempting to do which Jeroboam had his arm palsied." There is little power of religion left when the servants of God are treated with contempt and hardship.

IV. Seen in the way in which God is ignored even in affliction (verse 23, comp. with 2 Chron. xvi. 12). From the whole narrative of Chronicles we gather that the character of Asa deteriorated as he grew old, and that while he maintained the worship of Jehovah consistently from first to last, he failed to maintain the personal faith and piety which had been so conspicuous in his early youth. In his great and fatal affliction "he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians." Not that he was blamed for adopting the best means within his reach for his recovery, but he was blamed for relying more upon the skill of the physicians instead of upon the Lord's blessing upon the means they employed. It is in affliction that man realises his helplessness and need, and when, more than at any other time, he is called upon to depend upon the gracious interference and help of God. It is a lamentable proof of how sadly and deeply the religious spirit has declined when God is forgotten at a period of great extremity, and in the near prospect of death!

LESSONS:—1. *A time of high religious tension is usually followed by a time of reaction.* 2. *Religious reaction is fraught with great danger, and calls for patient and skilful treatment on the part of the church.* 3. *In a time of religious reaction there is always much to disappoint and grieve the hearts of God's people.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 16. The enemies who rise up against us and bring us into straits must often serve, in the hand of God, to try and prove whether our faith is rooted in the deepest soil of the heart, and our zeal in religious things no fleshy one, but a high and holy one.

Verse 17. The devices of the wicked. I. Are maliciously planned to place hindrances in the way of the good. II. Are prodigal of labour and expense in accomplishing the desired end. III. Will be ignominiously defeated.

Verses 18-21. The eloquence of gold. 1. Is often more potent than words. 2. Is an irresistible argument to the avaricious. 3. Has made many a one a traitor to the most solemn engagements. 4. Will set an army in motion for any purpose. 5. Rarely fails in winning a victory.

Verse 18. To confront his rival of Israel, Baasha, this religious king of Judah fetches in Benhadad, the king of Syria, into God's inheritance, upon too dear a rate, the breach of his league, the expilation of the temple. All the wealth wherewith Asa had endowed the house of the Lord was little enough to hire an Edomite to betray his fidelity and to invade Israel. Leagues may be made with infidels: not at such a price, upon such terms. There can be no warrant for a wilful subornation of perfidiousness. In these cases of outward things, the mercy of God dispenseth with our true necessities, not with the affected. O Asa! where was thy piety while thou robbest God, to corrupt an infidel, for the slaughter of Israelites? O princes! where is your piety while ye hire Turks to the slaughter of Christians, to the spoil of God's church?—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 19. This is the curse resting upon the strife of brethren: each forms a league with the common enemy rather than resolve upon peace with each other. The least reliable friend and companion in need is he who can be bought with gold, and is always at the disposal of the highest bidder. He who persuades another to break faith must be prepared to find that he will not maintain the word given to him. In every strait, seek first the support and aid of thy God, without whom no man can help thee.

Verse 20. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein, and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him (Prov. xxvi. 27). Baasha wished to become possessed of an additional city, and thus lost a series of his own cities; with the same stones with which he purposed to strengthen Ramah, Asa built two strong cities.—*Lange.*

Verse 22. Factious opposition. 1. Is ever short-sighted and short-lived. 2. Is liable to a sudden collapse. 3. May have the materials it gathered used against itself.

Verse 23. As the life, so the death-bed of Asa wanted not infirmities, long and prosperous had his reign been: now, after forty years' health and happiness, he that imprisoned the prophet is imprisoned in his bed. There is more pain in these fetters which God put upon Asa, than those which Asa put upon Hanani. And now, behold, he that in his war seeks to Benhadad, not to God, in his sickness seeks not to God, but to physicians. We cannot easily put upon God a greater wrong than the alienation of our trust. Earthly means are for use, not for confidence; we may, we must, employ them; we may not rely on them. Well may God challenge our trust as his peculiarly, which, if we cast upon any creature, we deify it. Whence have herbs and drugs and physicians their being and efficacy, but from that Divine hand? No marvel, then, if Asa's gout struck to his heart, and his feet carried him

to his grave, since his heart was miscarried, for the cure of his feet, to an injurious misconfidence in the means, with neglect of his Maker.—*Bp. Hall.*

— The teachings of affliction. 1. Affliction is often sent in mercy. 2. Suggests topics for serious reflection. 3. Is the more admonitory when associated with age. 4. Often leads the wanderer back to God. 5. Can only increase the distress of the obstinately impenitent.

Verse 24. Sickness in old age, previous to death, is a Divine chastisement and trial, to wean men from the world and ripen them for eternity. How many men would die unconverted if God did not visit them before death with sickness!

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 25-34.

The Punishment of the Wicked by the Wicked.

The sacred writer having traced the history of the kings of Judah to the death of Asa, in the sixty-first year of the divided kingdom, proceeds at this point with an account of the contemporary kings, the narrative occupying seven chapters, beginning with Nadab, who ascended the throne in Asa's second year, and concluding with Ahab, in whose fourth year Asa died. During the single reign of Asa, the government of the rival kingdom of Israel was in six different hands, and the record of that period is stained with conspiracy, crime, and bloodshed. In this paragraph we have an example of how the wicked are sometimes punished by the wicked, which suggests a few obvious reflections.

I. That a life of wickedness is full of danger (verses 25-28). It was so to Nadab. It made him an incompetent and unreasonable ruler. It multiplied his miseries. It shortened his days. It alienated the attachment of his subjects—not one of them cared to avenge his murder, or seemed to be horrified at the foulness of the crime, though this was the first regicide that was committed in the history of the kingdom. Sin is a state of unnature; it is a breach of the order of the universe, and it is impossible to escape its penalties, except by finding the refuge in Him "who bare our sins, and carried our sorrows." "The seeds of our own punishment," says Hesiod, "are sown at the same time we commit sin."

> We rave, we wrestle, with Great Nature's plan,
> We thwart the Deity; and 'tis decreed,
> Who thwart His will shall contradict their own.

A life of wickedness is menaced with a thousand perils, and, if persisted in, will terminate in misery and woe.

II. That the wicked are sometimes used to punish the wicked. Baasha, a hitherto obscure military adventurer, a bold, pitiless conspirator, was the instrument who punished the hapless Nadab, and who carried out the long-threatened vengeance against the house of Jeroboam (verses 29, 30). He would do this to secure himself on the throne he had so wickedly usurped, without thinking of Ahijah's prophecy (chap. xiv. 10-14)—perhaps without knowing it. He might be influenced by some personal quarrel with Nadab, or to be revenged on the house of Jeroboam for some injury received from them, or to rid the country of the cruel tyranny of an unpopular prince, or to clear the way for carrying out his own ambitious and daring schemes. Yet he signally fulfilled the Divine threatenings with a more savage barbarity than was originally intended. He not only slew every male, but "he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed"; and thus the dynasty of Jeroboam became utterly and hopelessly extinct. It is a terrible thing to be abandoned to the remorseless cruelty of the

wicked. The sack of Rome by the Goths (*vide* Gibbon, c. xxxi.) is a graphic example of the merciless and unbridled ferocity with which one wicked nation may punish another. Well might David pray, "Let us now fall into the hands of the Lord; and let me not fall into the hands of man" (2 Sam. xxiv. 14).

III. That the use of the wicked as instruments of punishment does not necessarily turn them from their wickedness (verse 34). Baasha continued in the same evil courses which had brought such frightful sufferings upon his predecessors, and in inflicting which he had been the unconscious instrument—another illustration how little influence the most notable punishments of sin has in deterring the wicked from their sins. "The entail of iniquity cannot be cut off but by a thorough conversion of the soul to God; and of this these bad kings seem to have had no adequate notion. The wicked followed the steps of the wicked, and became still more wicked. Sin gathers strength by exercise and age." The sinner cannot reform himself; and he vainly strives to maintain his authority and prestige by the mad, purblind policy of committing still more outrageous acts of iniquity. What would be the condition of the world if wickedness had unchecked and unrestricted sway? What must be the nameless horrors of that Gehenna where all moral restrictions to evil are removed!

LESSONS:—1. *The forbearance of God has its limits.* 2. *A similar punishment to that which the wicked have inflicted on others may overtake themselves.* 3. *A life of sin leads to misery and death.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 25-34. Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, reigned but two years over Israel. Then Baasha, of the tribe of Issachar, conspired against him and slew him. There is nothing in the records of conspiracies like this which separates the Bible history from ordinary history. We have, on a very small scale, in the annals of a few petty tribes, just what we have expanded to its highest power in the history of the Roman or of the Byzantine Empires. Nor is the result different. The new house is like the old. The rebel and murderer becomes a tyrant. It will be said, There is a grandeur about crimes and miseries which affect a world; but what interest can we feel in the story of men so diminutive in influence, so insignificant in character, as Jeroboam or Baasha? I answer, The Scripture wishes us to feel none, except so far as by a small experiment we may discover a truth for all ages and nations.—*Maurice.*

Verses 25-31. The ruin of the house of Jeroboam proclaims these two great truths: Sin is the destruction of a people (Prov. xiv. 34); and: He who heareth not My word, of him will I require it (Deut. xviii. 19). God does not punish the innocent children for the sins of their fathers, but those who, despising the Divine patience and long-suffering shown to their fathers, perpetuate, without any shame, the sins of their fathers (Ex. xx. 5, 6). A given example of evil is rarely without imitation; as Jeroboam rebelled against the house of David, so did Baasha against the house of Jeroboam. Desire for rule and envy beget first dissatisfaction with the condition in life ordained by God, lead then to breach of faith, and end at last with murder and homicide.—*Lange.*

Verses 27, 28. Conspiracy. 1. Is often provoked by a reckless and tyrannical government. 2. Is often the dangerous policy of the wicked and ambitious. 3. Is often associated with cruelty and murder.

Verse 27. It is curious to find Issachar furnishing a king. This tribe had never made, and could have no grounds for making, a claim to pre-eminence. It had furnished one

undistinguished judge, Tola (Judges x. 1), who, on obtaining his office, had at once settled himself in the territory of Ephraim. Otherwise the tribe was as little famous as any that could be named. The "ass crouching between two burthens" was a true symbol of the patient, plodding cultivators of the Esdraelon plain, who "saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed their shoulder to bear, and became servants unto tribute (Gen. xlix. 14, 15). It cannot have been in consequence of any claims or merits on the part of his tribe that Baasha became king. He probably owed his rise simply to his own audacity and his known valour and skill as a soldier. He appears not to have been even a person of good position in his tribe (chap. xvi. 2).—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verses 29, 30. **Divine vengeance.** I. Though delayed, is certain. II. May be unconsciously carried out by wicked and cruel men. III. Is not meaningless in its threatenings. IV. Is manifested on account of inveterate wickedness.

Verse 29. **Conspirators and rebels** profess to overthrow tyranny and to throw off its yoke; but when they obtain power and sovereignty they are themselves the most violent and cruel tyrants.

Verse 34. **Baasha trod in the footsteps of Jeroboam** just as if Jeroboam had been good and upright. And yet Baasha himself was an instrument in the hand of God to punish Jeroboam on account of his sins. What folly! When Jeroboam's son, Nadab, did as his father, we can explain it by paternal influence; but that Baasha should have pursued the same course is a proof of monstrous blindness. The world does not allow itself to be interrupted in its purposes; vain conduct after the way of those who live before is always inherited (1 Peter i. 18).—*Calvin.*

— **Sin morally blinding.** I. Hides from the soul the excessive turpitude of sin. II. Renders the soul incapable of learning lessons from the most terrible punishments of sin. III. Prevents the soul from seeing the danger and misery into which it is surely drifting.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DYNASTIC TROUBLES OF ISRAEL.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Word of the Lord came to Jehu**—His father was a prophet (2 Chron. xvi. 7). This is the only incident on record of Jehu. Verse 2. **Forasmuch as I exalted thee**—Not that God sanctioned the method by which Baasha attained the throne, but Divine Providence allowed the attainment. Verse 3. **Behold I will take away**—"By me kings reign." Having reproduced the iniquities of Jeroboam, he should experience the same doom; the similitude of their fate extending to their "posterity." Verse 9. **His servant Zimri**—Josephus states that Zimri took advantage of the absence of the army and its chief to undertake the siege of Gibbethon. Doubtless this arrangement for debauching Elah in Aza's house was a part of the plot of Zimri. He thought to consolidate his sovereignty by the massacre, not only of the relatives, but also of "*the friends*" of the royal house. Verse 15. **Did Zimri reign seven days**—A brief possession of a throne won by such criminal deeds! The Israelites repudiated the villainous usurper. Verse 18. **Into the palace of the king's house**—ארמון means the *highest* place in the king's house; "the fortress of the palace, the securest and inmost place; for the royal palace contained a great number of buildings" (*Gesenius*). **Burnt the king's house over him**—The Syriac says, the *besiegers* fired the royal house over his head. Verse 19. **For his sins . . and in walking in the way of Jeroboam**—As he only reigned "seven days," this must refer to his previous career, although "*the sins which he sinned*" well describe his sanguinary deeds in seizing the throne. Verse 22. **So Tibni died, and Omri reigned**—According to Josephus (*Antiq.* viii. 12, 5), Tibni was slain; which seems the necessary termination of the struggle. The phrase, "*So* he died," does not allow of the thought of a natural death, whereby Tibni conveniently left the posi-

tion unchallenged to Omri; but a forced conclusion of the rivalry by the death of Tibni. However, יָמַת does not definitely indicate a violent death. **Verse 24. Bought the hill Samaria of Shemer**—The "two talents of silver" purchase price equal less than £700. Thus this hill became the site of the royal residences of the kings of Israel, and Samaria the capital of the kingdom of Israel, until Israel was dispersed and the kingdom ceased. *Stanley* says of this site: In the centre of a wide amphitheatre of mountains, about six miles from Shechem, rises an oblong hill, with steep yet accessible sides, and a long flat top extending east and west, and rising 500 or 600 feet above the valley. *Knobel* says: It was a beautiful round mountain, covered with splendid trees, commanding a glorious prospect of the fruitful valley and the heights and villages surrounding it. *Layard* tells us a tablet was dug from the ruins of Nineveh relating to Samaria, thereon called *Beth-Khumri*, the house of Omri. Verse 30. **Ahab, the son of Omri**—A name fraught with woe for Israel! Verse 30. **Took to wife Jezebel**—*Ethbaal*, her royal father, murdered his own brother (king Philetos), was a priest also of Baal. Fit parent of this woman. Verse 32. **Reared up an altar for Baal**—Fully handed over his kingdom to the Tyrian idolatry. הַבַּעַל is the Phœnician sun-god; the "altar," מִזְבֵּחַ, was a pillar or image (*comp.* Notes on xiv. 23). **Verse 33. And Ahab made a grove**—The Ashterah (see on xiv. 15). Thus Jehovah's worship ceased by royal encouragement and example, if not by edict, and Jezebel saw the idolatry of her own people established in Israel. **Verse 34. Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho**—More than 500 years intervened between the curse (Josh. vi. 26) and its literal fulfilment. Ahab, having repudiated Jehovah as an object of personal and national worship, further showed his defiance of God in rearing this city, whose overthrow was a memorial of Israel's salvation by Jehovah. Whether Hiel's sons perished by violence during the erection of Jericho is unknown; the fact alone is here preserved that the curse was literally fulfilled.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-14.

The Doom of the Usurper.

I. Is self-imposed. 1. *Opportunity is afforded to reach a different destiny* "I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel" (verse 2). Though the means by which Baasha seized the throne was foully wrong, yet when he had acquired the highest rank and the mightiest power in the realm, he had the opportunity of using his influence in favour of religious reform. He was raised from the lowest rank, and from a tribe hitherto undistinguished; and the "might" with which he ruled for twenty-four years, causing even Asa to call in the aid of the Syrian king, showed that he was not deficient in capacity. Had he striven to walk in the commandments of God, his sins would have been forgiven, and his dynasty firmly secured. But the opportunity passed unimproved. A great person is like a great hill, sometimes giving a beautiful prospect, at other times shrouded in darkness and shaking with storms. 2. *A course of evil is deliberately and persistently followed.* "Thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam" (verse 2). A man is not wicked all at once. Wickedness has its gradations. Bad thoughts come first, bad words follow, and bad deeds finish the progress. Wickedness is infectious. "Thou hast made my people Israel to sin." A bad man is like bad water: both are poisons. The only disturber of men, of families, cities, kingdoms, worlds, is sin; there is no such troubler, no such traitor to any state, as the wilfully wicked man; no such enemy to the public as the enemy of God. Sin which is deliberately chosen and practised, and enforced on others, will bring its own doom.

II. Is not reached unwarned (verses 1-4, 7). This is made clear by a *double* reference to the fact that the prophet Jehu was sent to remind Baasha of his sin, and to pronounce a judgment on him and his house, similar to that which fell on the house of Jeroboam. Though the destruction of Jeroboam had been foretold, and though Baasha may be rightly regarded as God's instrument to

punish Jeroboam's sins, yet, as he received no command to execute God's wrath on the offender, and was instigated solely by ambition and self-interest, his guilt was just as great as if no prophecy had been uttered. The proud usurper, blinded by success, and still more by a life of impenitent wickedness, is apt to be indifferent to the awful doom which is certainly descending on his head. But, in his mercy, God sends His faithful messengers to warn and prepare; and he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul (Ezek. xxxiii. 4). The warnings of God are manifold and constant; and dull indeed must be the ear that cannot hear, and hard indeed the heart that cannot feel. The sinner's *can not* is his *will not*, and his will not is his condemnation.

III. Will be terrible and complete (verses 11-13). The doom so long and so plainly threatened fell at length with fearful and desolating severity. Zimri exterminated the race of Baasha; and the Jews say when such a matter is determined, they not only destroy the house of the person himself, but the five neighbouring houses, that the memory of such a person may perish from the earth. "The excesses of our youth are drafts upon our old age, payable with interest about thirty years after date." Philo Judaeus says that the builders of Babel engraved everyone his name upon a brick, with a view of perpetuating their memory: yet this did not serve their purpose. It is just with God to bury those names in the dust which are raised by sin. The atrocities of the usurper will not go unpunished.

IV. Extends to his posterity (verses 9, 10). Elah inherited all the low, gross instincts of his father, without any of his courage and ability. When an oriental monarch indulges in intoxication he is expected at any rate to do it secretly. He is further precluded by etiquette from accepting the hospitality of his subjects. Elah appears to have set at defiance this restraint, and, like the Egyptian Amasis, to have continually reminded men of his low origin by conduct unworthy of royalty. It is sometimes the curse of a bad man that his sins descend to his children, and their punishment too. When a man lays the foundation of his own ruin, others will be too apt to build upon it. As the winds of winter chase the withered leaves hither and thither, so are the wicked chased. They flee at their own shadow, and death opens to them all the errors of a misspent life. When too late they shut their eyes in despair—undone! undone!

LESSONS:—1. *A possession unlawfully acquired is a fruitful source of evil.* 2. *God warns before he strikes.* 3. *To harden the heart in iniquity is to bring ruin on one's own head.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-14. Of the two kings, Elah and Zimri, we learn nothing besides that they held to the sin of Jeroboam, except how they died. This was, however, sufficient to characterise them. We see that Elah did not even inherit energy and courage from his father Baasha, but was a coward and a low-souled glutton, because when the whole army was engaged in combat with the Philistines before Gibbethon, he not only remained at home, but drank and caroused. Zimri was still worse; ambition led him to unfaithfulness and treason; he not only murdered his king and master, but the king's whole house. How little esteemed and respected he was, appears from the fact that the whole army, as soon as they heard of his having ascended the throne, immediately made another king, and marched against Zimri. Then when shut in and surrounded, he set fire to the citadel over his head, and gave himself to the flames—his act was one

of despair rather than of heroism (verses 17, 18).—*Lange.*

Verses 1-4. The general law is repeated with the same stern simplicity to one man as to another. "Whether you came in by right means or foul; whether you are a legitimate heir or a conspirator, God has made you a prince; your crime is your own. Your power is His. Trying to be something in yourself, you pronounce your own sentence. When you think to make gods, God unmakes you." The principle is again affirmed, that a regular succession, a sure house, is a blessing to a land: that a man who desires to found such a one, desires a good gift; but that it is a gift; that as a witness of God's permanence and presence it is good; that succession, apart from Him, is a mere transmission of curses. The particular phrase, "provoke me to anger," is used here as it is everywhere else in the Bible. God is contemplated as jealous over His people, feeling like a husband or father to a rebellious wife or child. It is presented with all boldness to men who had the lowest, most grovelling conceptions of the divine nature, not to flatter them, but to counteract them, to destroy the fiction that God is indifferent to His creatures or hates them, which is the foundation of all idolatry, to prepare the way for the full revelation of that truth which interprets His jealousy, and is the ground of all right faith in man—"God is Love."—*Maurice.*

Verses 2-4. The sins of the common people which they have learned from their princes, as well also as those which these do not restrain when they can, are charged to them. Those who are lifted up out of the dust are often the proudest and most arrogant, because they think they must thank only themselves for their exalted position, and they forget what is written in 1 Sam. ii. 7. For Baasha, also, the hour struck when it was said, Behold, oh! most proud, &c. (Jer. l. 31). The throne that has been obtained by lying, deceit, falsehood, and bloodshed, has no stability. The judgment of God, though delayed for a time, will not always tarry (Psa. v. 6, 7). Robbers and murderers are not always in caves and the hidden recesses of forests; sometimes they are seated upon thrones: but the Lord will sweep them away, and their end will be with horror. Before His tribunal, no people, no crown is a protection.—*Osiander.*

Verse 2. The responsibilities of rank. I. Afford exceptional opportunities for doing great good, or great mischief. II. Are rarely used for the noblest purposes when unrighteously acquired. III. Merit corresponding punishment when abused.

Verse 6. The little that is told of Baasha is sufficient to show that he was an ambitious, rough, and violent—indeed, even a blood-thirsty—man. He did not conspire against his lord and king, and usurp the throne in order to bring the fundamental law of Israel into force again, and to make an end of the sin of Jeroboam, for he himself adhered firmly to it all his life, in spite of all the warnings and threatenings of the prophets. He only cared for dominion, and for this he esteemed the sin of Jeroboam as necessary as the latter had done. In short, he seems to have been a rough soldier who cared little or nothing about religion. He was the first king-murderer in Israel, and led the way, as it were, to this crime, which was afterwards so often imitated.—*Lange.*

Verses 8-10. King Elah. I. He riots and carouses whilst his people are pouring out their blood in war. It is a sign of great barbarousness and rudeness amid exterior refinement, when the great and rich lead a frivolous and luxurious life, whilst the masses eat their bread in the sweat of their brow, and are famishing. A riotous court-life is the usual precursor of the storm which shakes or destroys the throne. II. Death suddenly overtakes him in drunkenness. To go suddenly

and unprepared from time into eternity is a heavy fate: but it is still more fearful to leave the world in drunkenness. The nearer chastisement comes to the ungodly, the more secure are they. It is fearful when one can say nothing more of a man than "He has despised God and His word, served his belly, and ended his life with a revel." Better to famish and be miserable with Lazarus, and then be borne by angels into Abraham's bosom, than with the rich man to live in splendour and revelry, and afterwards to suffer the pains of Hell.—*Wurt. Summ.*

Verse 8. **The crime of murder.** I. Is heinous in the sight of God and man. II. Is ever a ready weapon in the hand of an unscrupulous usurper. III. Never goes unavenged. IV. Is a stain of infamy on succeeding generations.

Verse 9. **Drunkenness.** 1. Is an evidence of great moral degradation. 2. Forfeits the respect of others. 3. Renders a man an easy victim to his enemies. 4. Is closely associated with violence and crime. 5. Incapacitates for the most obvious duties. 6. Inevitably issues in a miserable death.

— Drunken revels are an abomination to the Lord, and only occur where the fear of God is absent. The drunkards rank with those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10); and the Lord Christ warns —Take heed to yourselves, &c. (Luke xxi. 34).

Verse 13. **The emptiness of idolatry.** I. It is a "vanity"—"vapour," "nothingness." II. As a creation of man it is inferior to himself. III. It is unsatisfying to man. IV. It provokes the anger of God.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 15-28.

Sin the Prolific Source of National Calamities.

I. It degrades the throne and vitiates its authority (verses 15-20). It places the crown at the disposal of ambitious adventurers. At this period in the history of Israel there is a remarkable resemblance to the events which led to the accession of the Flavian dynasty at Rome; and the character and career of the Roman Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian bear a curious similarity to the Israelitish Elah, Zimri, Tibni, and Omri. Whoever could best succeed in bribing the army was sure to gain the crown; and the monarch for the time being used his exalted position and power for purposes of personal indulgence and debauchery. "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness; for the throne is established by righteousness" (Prov. xvi. 12).

> He's a king,
> A true, right king, that dare do aught save wrong;
> Fears nothing mortal but to be unjust:
> Who is not blown up with flattering puffs
> Of spongy sycophants; who stands unmoved
> Despite the jostling of opinion.

But where sin is triumphant, and justice and righteousness are disregarded, no throne can be stable. The very army which has elevated the monarch may be the instrument of his fall and ruin. Sin tarnishes the crown, breaks the sceptre of authority, and weakens the whole nation. The usurper is often the dupe of his own wickedness. You smile when you see a child trying to grasp its own shadow; but how many have been grasping shadows all their lives, and will continue to reach out and grasp as long as breath and eyesight last!

II. It divides the people, and introduces all the horrors of civil war (verses 21, 22). For four years the rival claimants of the crown carried on the fratricidal contest, and in all probability Tibni suffered a violent death. As soon as

Zimri—Sardanapalus-like—came to such a suicidal end, it would appear that the authorities at Tirzah, disliking a military despotism, elected Tibni as king, and as the army had already elected Omri, the nation was plunged into all the miseries of civil war, which was terminated by Omri gaining the supremacy. Bitterly do the seceding tribes reap the fruits of evil sowing; for not only are they given up to idolatry, but are half swallowed up in anarchy. Both Tibni and Omri would have done well to refuse these proffered honours, considering what had befallen the kings that had gone before them. Macro, captain of the guard, and Laco, knight of the watch, Romans who had been active in ruining Sejanus, had great honours bestowed upon them by the Senate. But they refused them; and Dion attributed the reason of their refusal to the terrors of an example so fresh in their memories. "The nation from whose heart rectitude is gone, in whose soul vice runs riot, has its throne built on moral gunpowder."

III. It encourages the ruling power to perpetrate acts of unexampled wickedness (verses 25, 26). Omri "did worse than all that were before him." Worse than Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, and Elah. He was an idolater in principle and in practice. He led the people to idolatry by precept and example; and he went beyond all his predecessors in legalising and enforcing idolatry upon his subjects by statutes, for we read in Micah vi. 16, of "the statutes of Omri, the keeping of which made Israel a desolation." Taking this in connection with the character which the historian ascribes to him, we cannot doubt, remarks Kitto, that these "statutes of Omri," which were but too well maintained by his successors and observed by the subjects of his kingdom, were measures adopted for more completely isolating the people of Israel from the services of the House of the Lord at Jerusalem, and for perpetuating, perhaps increasing, their idolatrous practices. Jeroboam made Israel to sin by temptation, example, and allurement; but Omri did it by compulsion. Thus when a people forsake God, they go from worse to worse, till destruction comes upon them to the uttermost.

LESSONS:—1. *The frequent end of ambitious projectors is to perish in the flames they have themselves kindled.* 2. *Envy and revenge, even in death, forsake not the wicked.* 3. *Of all inflictions on a nation, none are more terrible than civil wars.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 15-20. The vanity of an ill-gotten success. I. An ill-gotten success is evanescent in its character (verse 15). II. Creates numerous enemies (verse 16). III. Has to contend with violent opposition (verse 17). IV. Drives to acts of desperation (verse 18). V. Brings its own inevitable punishment (verse 19). VI. Acquires an unenviable notoriety (verse 20).

Verse 18. Despair. I. Often the result of baffled ambition. II. Is one of the sharpest stings of a guilty conscience. III. Is associated with the bitterest feelings of hatred and revenge. IV. Frequently ends in suicide.

— The doom of despair is the end of a life given over to sin, which has lost sight of the living God, and can never again find Him. Frequently what the world regards as heroism and contempt of death is simply cowardice and crime in the sight of God. The Lord has no pleasure, &c. (Ezek. xviii. 23). It requires more courage and bravery to bear the merited punishment of one's sins than to escape from it by suicide.

— Zimri's desperate act has been repeated more than once in the world's history. That the last king of

Assyria, the Sardanapalus of the Greeks, thus destroyed himself, is almost the only *fact* which we know concerning him. Herodotus gives a similar account of a contemporary of his, a certain Boges, a Persian general left by Xerxes to defend Eïon when he retired from Europe after Salamis. He also relates that the Xanthians, when pressed by Harpagus, burnt their wives, their children, and their slaves in the Acropolis, and then threw themselves on the Persian swords.

Verses 21, 22. Anarchy. I. The inevitable consequence of national irreligion. II. Is fomented and sustained by incompetent and unscrupulous rulers. III. Is not suppressed without much cruelty and suffering.

Verses 23-28. The power of a wicked life. I. Is the more dangerous when associated with material prosperity (verse 24). II. Transforms a king into a tyrant (verses 25, 26). III. Is the less excusable in a man of valour and capacity (verse 27). IV. Is transmitted to succeeding generations (verse 28).

Verses 24-26. Omri built Samaria, making it the strong centre of the kingdom; but he walked in all the sins of Jeroboam, and did worse than all who went before him. It is not said in what respect he was worse, but it certainly implies that he maintained the anti-theocratic institutions of Jeroboam with great zeal and decision. It appears that he stood well as captain of the army, for it was in the camp that he was elected to the throne. Yet, however valiant he may have been as a warrior, in the chief thing—namely, in his relation to Jehovah and the theocratic fundamental law—he stood worse than any of his predecessors, and was furthest from being what was especially required of a theocratic king, that is, a servant of Jehovah. A man may be skilful and useful to himself and others in all material and worldly things, whilst in spiritual and divine things he works only mischief and destruction. What, without religion, is so-called civilization?— *Lange*.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 29-34.

The Rejection of God the Acme of Wickedness.

The beginning of Ahab's reign commences a new epoch in the history of Israel; new, not so much in the flagrant forms of wickedness that manifest themselves, as in the relative importance of the kingdom of Israel during the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram. With the exception of Jeroboam, the reigns of Ahab's predecessors are very briefly noticed, occupying but parts of two chapters; but the incidents of the three following reigns, embracing a period of about thirty-five years, extend from this passage to the tenth chapter of 2 Kings. During this period the kingdom of Judah receives comparatively little notice, and then only as an ally of the Northern kingdom, which stands out predominantly as the mightiest ruling power in the land. During the same period appeared those greatest, sternest, most mysterious of prophets, Elijah and Elisha, whose lives and acts, with strange romantic blendings, present on the one hand the fierce vindictiveness of the theocratic spirit towards sin, and, on the other, the tender and shrinking humanity which shows them up as men of like passions with ourselves. By means of Jezebel, the Sidonian princess, Phenician idolatry is introduced and sanctioned in the kingdom, and Baal's prophets are multiplied by hundreds. A fierce persecution arises against the worshippers of Jehovah—faithfulness to the Lord God of Israel being by the court regarded as disaffection to the government and its measures. Wars, attended with varying fortunes, are carried on with several hostile kingdoms, while within the land the few pious weep in desolate sadness, and hide

themselves in caves and dens of the earth. Israel seemed to reach the summit of its wickedness during the reign of Ahab. Observe

I. That a wicked son may exceed the iniquity of a wicked father. "And Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him" (verse 30). The name of Ahab has attained an evil eminence in the world's history. Like Antiochus Epiphanes, and Nero, he had a love of art, and he was not destitute of generous impulses; but he stands forth an example of the lengths of wickedness to which a weak selfishness may be driven by the influence of a stronger will. The great sin of Ahab —that by which he differed from all his predecessors, and exceeded them in wickedness—was his introduction of the worship of Baal, consequent upon his marriage with Jezebel, a name even more infamous than his own; and his formal establishment of this gross and palpable idolatry as the religion of the state. He was but carrying out to its inevitable results the vile policy of his father. It is an unspeakable curse to be under the training of a wicked father; and it is no wonder if a son thus trained should outvie his father in vice and profanity.

II. That a wicked wife may exert a still more baneful influence over a wicked husband (verse 31). "The marriage of Ahab with this princess," writes Stanley, "was one of those turning points in the history of families where a new influence runs like poison through all its branches, and transforms it into another being. Jezebel was a woman in whom, with the reckless and licentious habits of an Oriental queen, were united the fiercest and sternest qualities inherent in the old Semitic race. Her husband, in whom generous and gentle feelings were not wanting, was yet of a weak and yielding character, which soon made him a tool in her hands. Even after his death, through the reigns of his sons, her presiding spirit was the evil genius of the dynasty." This is the first recorded instance of an Israelitish king choosing his chief wife from among the cursed Canaanitish race, and both king and people had good reason for bitterly repenting the choice. The character of Jezebel, as portrayed in the following chapters, is an embodiment of all that is most awful and terrible in the Clytemnestra of the Greek tragedians, and in the Lady Macbeth of Shakespeare. Woe to the man who is under the thumb of a clever, designing, enterprising, but radically wicked wife!

III. That the public sanction and practice of idolatry amounts to a total rejection of God (verse 32). Hitherto the Israelites had not cast off their allegiance to Jehovah, nor ceased to worship Him, though their worship was damaged by the presence of unworthy emblems, and degraded by maimed rites and an unlawful priesthood. But in the dark times of Ahab and Jezebel, while they did not in so many specific terms formally renounce Jehovah, they did what was practically the same by setting up other gods besides Him, and holding Him of no more account than them. Baal-worship became the fashionable and court religion; and the mass of the people, prepared by the idolatrous experiences of previous reigns, would readily adopt it. Baal was the chief male divinity among the Phenicians, as Ashtoreth was their female divinity. Jehovah can tolerate no rival; and a divided worship cannot be acceptable to Him. If idolatry is preferred, then Jehovah is rejected; and the result is misery and death.

IV. That the rejection of God is the very acme of wickedness (verse 33). "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." We can be guilty of no greater sin than to reject God and the salvation He has provided through His son. "This is the

condemnation," &c. (Jno. iii. 19 compared with verse 36). It is not the enormity or number of our sins which causes our condemnation; but the unbelieving rejection of the Divine Redeemer. When we give up God, we give up everything—all help, all hope, all happiness, and, like a rudderless and sailless vessel, drift towards the gloomy rocks of destruction.

V. That in a time of abounding wickedness the most presumptuous acts are attempted (verse 34). The attempt to rebuild Jericho is adduced as a proof of the general impiety of Ahab's time. The curse of God against the man who should rebuild that city (Josh. vi. 26) had hitherto been believed and respected, and several hundred years had passed with no one so impious as to despise that curse. The place had been inhabited, but no one had ventured to fortify it and set up the gates. But now faith in the old religion had so decayed that Joshua's malediction, terrible as it was, no longer exercised a deterrent power. Hiel, a Bethelite—a native of that city which had so long been the scene of Israelitish calf-worship, and, perhaps, a despiser of Jehovah and His laws—undoubtedly a man of wealth and station, perhaps instigated by Ahab, undertook to restore the long ruined fortress, in spite of Joshua's menace. But he suffered for his temerity. In exact accordance with the words of Joshua's curse, he lost his firstborn son when he began to lay anew the foundations of the walls, and his youngest when he completed his work by setting up the gates, and, it is supposed, all his other children between. Of all sins, presumptuous sins are most offensive to God, and never fail to meet with their due meed of punishment. But when man abandons God, there is no degree of wickedness of which he is not capable. Hiel paid dearly for his presumption. He sought for a name, but he left it for a curse (Isa. lxv. 15). The man who defies the Almighty must bear the consequences.

LESSONS:—1. *It is a life-long plague for any man to be united to a wicked and abandoned woman.* 2. *If the idolater spares no expense or labour in serving his abominations, with what generosity and zeal ought the Christian to serve his God.* 3. *Idolatry has degrees of wickedness—the highest is reached when God is rejected.*

AHAB AND BAAL.

I. The worship of the calves which Jeroboam set up in Bethel and in Dan is carefully distinguished in Scripture from the worship of Baal which was introduced by Ahab into Samaria. Jeroboam wished to separate the ten tribes from those which followed the house of David, by giving them sacrifices and priests of their own. From the words which he is said to have used—"These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt"—it is probable that he affected to restore the idolatry which Aaron had sanctioned in the wilderness. He or his priests would suggest the thought to the people, or their own hearts would suggest it to them, that what the high priest approved could not be very wrong, that Moses had no right to break the calf in pieces, that the people in Jerusalem who followed the law of Moses were really departing from a good old example, that *they* were returning to a national service. The step from this ultra local worship to a foreign Phœnician worship seems a very long one, yet it was natural and easy. We cannot tell exactly what the calf signified to the Egyptian, still less what it signified to the Hebrew slave in the desert, or to the revolted tribes. It may have been merely adopted as a traditional symbol, no special force being attached to it. But a people trained in the law of Moses must have associated some recollection of an unseen Being even with the most worthless image. How strong such associations may be in any mind, how long they may continue, we have happily no means of deter-

mining. We only know that the conscience of the idolater becomes at once stupefied and sensitive; more and more incapable of appreciating moral distinctions; more and more alive to terrors. The thought of a righteous being is appalling; from an object of trust he passes into an object of horror. How to appease Him is the question. The old forms may not be the right. Other nations which seem happier and more prosperous, have other gods and sacrifices. It might be well to try them. The most powerful neighbour must be most worthy of imitation.

II. A king like Ahab meets the demand of a people in this state. The Scripture which speaks of the cities which he built, and his ivory house, and his might, and the wars which he warred, leaves the impression upon us that he was intellectually superior to his predecessors, of a higher ambition, less narrow in his notions. He had not the dread which Jeroboam felt of intercourse with Jerusalem, he cultivated the friendship of Jehoshaphat. At the same time he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and with her he naturalized a worship certainly more imposing and august than that which had been practised by the kings that were before him. There may, or may not, have been animal forms connected with the service of this God of Ekron. The name would seem only to impart a comprehensive notion of lordship, a notion which might express itself in a number of different symbols, which certainly would not be as limited to the one of the calf, or be likely to adopt that as its favourite. Baal would become Baalim, the general lord or ruler would soon be multiplied and divided into a number of lords and rulers; but there would be attached to them all a much grander feeling of dominion than could ever have entered into the mind of one who was bowing to the likeness of a calf which eateth hay.

III. Ahab would therefore seem to himself, as well as to a great many of his people, an improver and expander of the popular faith. Foreign priests with much more knowledge, probably, than those lowest of the people whom Jeroboam had consecrated, would come into the land. A number of the native priests would be quite ready to adopt the worships which the king and queen favoured. Though they might have some new rites to learn, though they might not like the strangers, or might be despised by them, yet they would not be conscious of any great change in themselves or their devotions. In their groves, on their hill altars, they had been seeking to propitiate some unknown fearful divinity. For that divinity they had now found a name. The Egyptian idol might suggest thoughts sometimes of the dark power, sometimes of Him who had made a covenant with their fathers; the Phœnician taught them to understand the distinction, to feel and know that they were invoking another than the Lord God whose presence Solomon had prayed might fill His temple.

IV. You see, then, why Ahab is said to have provoked the Lord God of Israel more than all that were before him. The Baal worship was essentially the worship of mere power. I do not say that abstractedly or originally it was the worship of an *evil* power; but it was the worship of power; therefore, of that which man sees without him in nature, not of that which he feels within speaking to himself. When we think that the things themselves exercise the power, and do not receive it from One in whom dwells eternal justice and rectitude, forms which denote the most violent and inexplicable outbursts of fury, the fire and the tempest, are speedily thought to represent the nature of the Baal or Baalim of the lord or lords of the universe. At all events, these are what man must address himself to. Some joyous feasts may be celebrated with wild and reckless licence to the gentler and humaner powers which manifest themselves in the propitious breeze, the quiet evening, the sun that

ripens the autumn fruits; but the most serious services, the sacrifices which those very enjoyments have made necessary, the libations of blood, must be presented to some malevolent nature which would destroy unless it were soothed. Thus the worship of power becomes literally the worship of evil. By a regular and awful process, Baal or Baal-zebud became in the minds of his devout servants what his name imported to Jews of later time—the Prince of the Devils.—*Maurice.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 29-34. **The king Ahab.** I. *His union with Jezebel*—a marriage contracted not in obedience to God's holy will, but merely upon worldly grounds and political considerations, and was, therefore, the source of great mischief to himself and to his people. II. *The uplifting of idolatry over the religion of the country.* The calf-worship was merged in the Baal-worship. The greatest tyranny is the tyranny over conscience, which pretends to rule also over belief. The worst rule is that which, instead of demanding recognition of the truth, substitutes lies and errors, and exercises its power in aid of unbelief and of superstition. III. *The rebuilding of Jericho.* By means of "faith" the walls of Jericho fell (Heb. xi. 30). Idolatry will build them up again; but the curse rests upon them. He who builds up what the Lord has destroyed, falls under His judgment. Julian, who rebuilt the heathen temple, and the Jews, who rebuilt the temple of Jerusalem, were confounded and brought to shame.—*Lange.*

Verse 30. **And what manner of man was he**—this Ahab, son of Omri—who gave his royal countenance and sanction to all these doings? Excuse is sometimes made for him as not an essentially wicked, but only a weak man, overborne by the powerful will of a resolute woman. But "all wickedness is weakness," and it is also true, that all weakness is wickedness, and most of all in a king. He to whose care the welfare of a nation has been entrusted, has no right to be weak. The weakness ascribed to Ahab seems to us merely indolence of character, a love of ease, an indisposition to exertion, unless when thoroughly roused by some awakening stimulus. He was such a man as would rather allow what he feels to be wrong, for the sake of a quiet life, than take the trouble of asserting what he knows to be right. To shake off, to battle against this sloth of temper, which made him the tool of others, and rendered him impotent for all good, was his duty as a man, and tenfold more his duty as a king; and to neglect that duty was wickedness, was ruin. And it ended, as all such neglect does, in bringing down upon him tenfold the trouble and disturbance of ease which he had striven to avoid. "Anything for an easy life," seems to have been Ahab's rule of conduct. But a king has no right to an easy life. It is hard work to be a king. Especially is it hard work in an Eastern country, where, on the person of the sovereign, are devolved many duties of decision, of judgment, and of action which, in Western countries, he assigns to his advisers and ministers.—*Kitto.*

— **The progress of wickedness.** I. Rapid. II. Encouraged by notorious examples. III. Begets an emulation to outstrip all predecessors. IV. Sinks a nation into moral degradation and ruin.

— **Moral corruption the cause of decay.** *I. That the judgments of God upon the wicked are not arbitrary, but are regulated by law.* Nothing whimsical or arbitrary may be ascribed to Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and who sees the end from the beginning. The idea that God is variable in His doings has, like all false things, created a reaction which threatens to be serious. The changing notions of theology have stirred the thoughts of men outside the theological circle, and led to the earnest study of these positive sciences

which reveal the order and regularity of all God's works. From this source has sprung a doctrine of God which represents Him as so fixed and changeless that it is painful from its very immutability. Even from this teaching of the Positivists we may learn that which may help our faith and clear our conceptions of God. In the physical world, God rules by law—law fixed and changeless—since the perfection of His wisdom forbids the necessity of change. May we not learn thence, that in the moral and spiritual world the same order will be observed, the same plan of government carried on? This thought is strengthened when we remember that the two worlds are ultimately one; the physical is only the type of the spiritual. The one plan of government pervades the whole. Effects follow causes in the sphere that belongs to the soul, as punctually as in the world of matter. If you break loose from the Divine plan of spiritual life, or refuse to be loyal to the spiritual laws of the kingdom, it is at your peril. II. *The illustrations of this law which the history of the world presents.* History, when written and read rightly, corroborates the declarations of the Word of God. Think of the time when the young world was filled with wickedness: the eternal laws of right and goodness were trampled under foot; God was forgotten, and human nature exasperated by its own rebellion. The punishment did not tarry long after the sin. So was it in like manner with the cities of the plain. So was it with the Jews. The cup of their iniquity was full. Through the ages their rebellion had been great. They obtained times for repentance without number, but always fell back to their old sin. With the Jews all life of the highest kind was gone; every inspiration to nobleness was eaten up. Only the carcase of a dead people was left, and where that is, "there will the eagles be gathered together." What is to be said of all those empires, kingdoms, and people which made such progress for a season, and whose glory filled the habitable globe? Where are Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage? In proportion as the conscience of a people is true to its own ideas of right and wrong will the energy of the people increase and their existence be prolonged; when it is otherwise, decay and death are certain. Let us not tempt God as did the Jews. O! do not continue in sin; do not play with the poison, lest it eat out the life, deaden your sensibility to God and right, leave you with your virtue utterly ruined, your God offended, your destiny lost.—*J. Coyle.*

Verse 31. Jezebel was just the woman to manage such a man; and she soon found how to manage Ahab as she pleased, and to become, in fact, through him, the regnant sovereign of Israel, while on him devolved the public responsibility of her acts. It was not by imperious temper, though she was imperious, nor by palpable domineering, that she managed this. No. She made herself necessary to him—necessary to his ease, his comfort, his pleasures. She worked for him, she planned for him, she decided for him. She saved him a world of trouble. She taught him to consider the strength of her will necessary to supply the weakness of his own—necessary to save him the labour of exertion and thought. Prompt in decision, ready in resource, quick in invention, ruthless in action—she saw her way at once to the point at which she aimed, and would cut with a sharp stroke through knotty matters which the king shrunk from the labour of untying. She was thus often enabled to secure for her husband the object of his desires which he himself hesitated to pursue, or despaired to obtain; and in accepting it from her hands, he cared not too nicely to enquire whether it were not stained with blood, or whether it heaped not upon his head coals of fire which would one day consume him.—*Kitto.*

— A native of Zidon and the daughter of its king, from the very first hour Jezebel set foot in Israel she became its poison and curse; and, indeed, among all who have disgraced

the name of woman, *she* must ever hold a loftily inglorious rank. We place her on the same platform with Lucretia Borgia, who shrank from no crime; with Mary, the daughter of Henry VIII., who sent Cramner, Latimer, Hooper, and Ridley to the stake; with Catherine de Medici, the real author of Black Bartholomew, when, in one single night, 70,000 Huguenots perished; with Lady Macbeth, the original of whom, it is believed by many, our national dramatist found in Jezebel. There is something in the very sound of that name that makes one scared and cold. What mother would call her daughter Jezebel? What epithet of more utter scorn, of more withering contempt, could be applied to any woman, the worst and most wicked? Even in her own day the character of Jezebel became a national byeword and proverb, and to the end of time her memory will rot as rotted her body when, trampled by horse and licked by dogs, they buried what remained, unwept, in a dishonoured grave.—*H. T. Howat.*

— **An unholy alliance.** I. Would never be entered into if the soul were not first demoralized. II. Yields the ascendency to the strongest will. III. Is a terrible weapon of mischief where a bad woman is the ruling genius.

— **Mixed marriages eminently inexpedient and dangerous.** Whether Scripture speaks or is silent, the facts of life cannot be denied. They abundantly testify that a want of mutual religious convictions between husband and wife injuriously affects their sacred relationship. True marriage rests on common admiration and sympathy, it is the union of hearts in the bonds of holiest love. If, however, religion, which concerns the deepest emotions and noblest thoughts, is excluded, the union of the two natures is disastrously incomplete, the real foundation of married life becomes fearfully insecure. A husband may love his wife because of her beautiful face or figure, her gentle manners, her intellectual gifts, her housewifely skill; but that love is meagre, partial, unsatisfactory; the richest chords of the soul remain untouched. If he be a devout man, serving Christ, that which he esteems the best thing in life she does not possess. The same is true on the other side. A Christian woman may feel that her husband is a noble man, but if he be not religious, he is not everything to her; she is perpetually craving sympathy which he cannot give. There is no union of soul. Then the hindrances and sorrows that spring from this spiritual isolation are incalculable. Man and wife do not understand each other, they look at numberless experiences from opposite standpoints, words of strife often follow, motives are imputed, sometimes sneers at saintliness are given on the one side and denunciations of godlessness on the other, which leave wounds behind them not soon healed. It is no secret, but a well-known fact, that multitudes of family quarrels arise because of this want of spiritual union, and the highest aspirations of the godly soul are perpetually thwarted by it. Then how perplexing is the education of the children. The parents are not at one, and while the example of one would lead them to an early consecration, the conduct of the other nullifies the intended result. If children, with their keen eyes and sure instincts, see one parent indifferent to religion, they will naturally conclude that they may neglect it too. To marry an unbelieving husband or wife may involve the future destiny of the offspring! If the children of such a union grow up in the fear of God it will be in spite of the bad example of one parent at home.—*W. Braden.*

Verse 32, 33. **A false worship.** I. Is expensive. II. Is strengthened by organization. III. Becomes more pernicious the longer it is tolerated. IV. Gradually supplants and then persecutes the true worship. V. Is specially offensive to God.

Verse 34. **The audacity of unbelief.** I. An inevitable result when idolatry is in the ascendant. II. Not

intimidated by the most awful imprecation. III. Meets with the punishment it defies.

— The victims of sin a warning to others. I. A warning against the commission of sin. II. A warning against associations with sinners. III. A warning against tempting others.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF ELIJAH THE TISHBITE.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Elijah the Tishbite—This is the first mention of him in Scripture; an abrupt introduction, which seems to imply that already he was known as a prophet; or the startling development of national apostasy under Ahab may have called out Elijah into sudden protestation. Tishbite—Not an Israelite, therefore, but a *Gentile*, whose employment in the prophetic ministry was itself a rebuke to the nation. Was there none in all Israel to speak for Jehovah? The name "Elijah," אֵלִיָּה, signifies, My God is Jehovah. Israel was rejecting HIM for idols, but this Gentile had rejected *idols* for HIM. "Tishbite," from Tisbe, a place east of Jordan. Tobit i. 2 refers to Θίσβε as being "at the right hand of the city properly called Naphtali, in Galilee above Aser." Said unto Ahab—It is suggested that this penal prediction proved the closing application of an unrecorded speech. All reasoning being ineffective, the prophet leaves the king with this prophetic sentence. Yet Elijah's manner was to accost the guilty with few, yet significant words, and then depart. Verse 3. Hide thyself by the brook Cherith—He should "hide," in order to escape alike the king's violence and importunities; also to allow his words to vindicate themselves as true, and give men time to learn their need of him and his God. Cherith—Site unknown. Various conjectures have attempted to locate it, but all is uncertain. Its obscure site indicates its great security as a hiding place. Verse 4. I have commanded the ravens—עֹרְבִים, which some, on account of these birds being legally "unclean," and notably voracious, have interpreted *Arabians*. The word is so used in Ex. xxvii. 27; 2 Chron. xxi. 16; Neh. iv. 17. Others regard the word as pointing to the inhabitants of Orbo, near by the supposed brook. Michaelis, objecting to the supernatural altogether, suggests that Elijah was merely told to feed himself from the raven's nest, by plundering them of the game they seized! Verse 9. Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon—*Sarepta*, situate between Tyre and Sidon, in the native land of Jezebel. Yet this "widow" knew JEHOVAH (verse 12), and appealed to His High Name in verification of her words. Verse 13. Fear not; go and do, &c.—A severe test of faith, for there was nothing between her and death except the promise of verse 14. Nevertheless, with nought save a promise to assure her, she made her solitary cake, and saw it eaten by Elijah. Yet *starvation* was not the issue, but *salvation*. Verse 17. Fell sick. . . no breath left in him—This phrase does not absolutely imply *death* (comp. Dan. x. 17; also 1 Kings x. 17). Josephus renders the incident thus—ὡς καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀφεῖναι καὶ δόξαι νεκρόν. We may concede that the boy was in a state of fatal exhaustion, sinking away into death, and not absolutely dead. But whichever was the case, his recovery was as really supernatural and miraculous. Verse 18. What have I to do with thee?—The bitter upbraiding of incoherent grief. My sin to remembrance—No particular sin, but the current error that affliction was a punishment (comp. John ix. 3). In the first passion and dismay of sorrow we strangely misread God's design. Verse 19. Carried him into a loft—The upper chamber; alone there with God, to plead for Divine interpretation and removal of this unexpected calamity. Verse 21. Stretched himself upon the child three times—"*Stretched himself*," &c., thereby employing rational means for warming, and thus revivifying the body; but not relying on natural methods for his restoration, but on God's intervention, using means of themselves ineffectual for the miraculous result. "*Three times*," "because the calling upon the name of Jehovah in the old covenant was a threefold act (Psa. lv. 18; Dan. vi. 10); thrice in the high priestly benediction was the name of Jehovah laid upon Israel (Numb. vi. 22); thrice did the seraphim before the throne of Jehovah cry out holy (Isa. vi. 3)."—*Lange*. And Jesus himself "left them and went away and prayed the third time, saying the same words" (Matt. xxvi. 44). Verse 24. Now by this I know—"Because thou hast seen thou hast believed;" yet she had already shown faith when proof was not visible. This was a most gracious seal to her faith, which had thus been doubly and sorely tried.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

The True Prophet and His Significant Message.

Israel had gone from bad to worse, and the cup of her iniquity was fast filling to the brim. Religion was little more than a name. Jehovah was no longer worshipped as a living person, but was only thought of as a far distant and but dimly comprehended being. Faith darkened into a grim unbelief, and virtue wallowed in the filth of a royalty-sanctioned sensuality, or hid itself in solitude with fear and trembling. The nation had revolted from the beneficent sway of Jehovah, and rushed with reckless haste into the embrace of a she-fiend, who held it as with a grip of iron, while she tantalized it with her voluptuous wiles, and goaded it to despair with her heartless cruelties. Surely the spell of the vile enchantress could not last for ever. The end must be at hand: the iniquity of the land cried to heaven for vengeance. A sense of approaching doom took possession of many minds; and it seemed as if a strange, mysterious stillness, like that which sometimes precedes the terrific tempest, settled on the nation—a stillness broken only now and then by the murmur of the idolatrous worshippers in the groves, or the loud, coarse laughter of the licentious priests as they feasted at Jezebel's table. Suddenly—like a meteor newly kindled in the heavens, or like a thunderbolt hurled from the clouds by the hand of the Almighty—Elijah bursts upon the scene. The revellers tremble and the king grows pale, as the bold and fearless prophet denounces their wickedness, and warns them of the sufferings which their sins would inevitably bring. Thus the darkest night of Israel's spiritual declension was broken by the appearance of that bright luminary Elijah, the greatest of all the prophets since Moses, and the type of that great preacher of repentance who was the forerunner of Christ.

I. That the true prophet is often called to his work out of comparative obscurity. "Elijah, the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead." It seemed very unlikely that a reformer would spring from the midst of the rough, uncouth inhabitants of Gilead. It was a wild, rocky, mountainous region, a country of chase, and the favourite haunt of robbers—something like what some parts of Palestine are rendered by the Bedouins of the present day; or, in relation to the rival kingdoms on the west side of the Jordan, very much what the Highlands were to the Lowlands of Scotland in the days of chieftain feud and foray (vide *Macaulay's* England). And yet it was just the place where the very qualities that were so essential in a prophet who would successfully contend with an Ahab and a Jezebel would be likely to be nurtured—the capacity of endurance, the fleet action, the intrepid boldness, the sternness of reproof amounting almost to fierceness. How true is it that God is not limited to locality in the choice of His servants! There was an Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, a Moses in the land of Midian, a Nicodemus in the Sanhedrim, a Joseph of Arimathea among the aristocracy of Jerusalem, a Cornelius in the Roman camp; there were saints in Cæsar's household, and in half-heathen Gilead there was found an Elijah.

II. That the true prophet bears unmistakable testimony as to the character of the only True God. "As the Lord God of Israel liveth." Jehovah is the *living* God. This truth was uttered by the fearless prophet with an abruptness, a solemnity, and a ringing vehemency that must have startled the guilty Ahab, and have reminded him that the dumb, dead idols to which he was yielding homage were incomparable with the All-powerful and Ever-living Jehovah whom he and his people had so wickedly forsaken. Elijah means *God-Jehovah*, so that even in his name the great reformer carries a rebuke to the Baal-serving king. The great need of Israel at this time was a revival among them of just ideas concerning God. Notwithstanding the special privileges they had enjoyed

in becoming acquainted with the True God, they were now in danger of losing all faith in Him, and of sinking down into a worse state of heathenism than that of the idolatrous nations by which they were surrounded. All true reform must begin by restoring to the mind clear and exalted conceptions of the character of God. This Elijah did, not so much by eloquence of speech, as by picturesqueness and significance of *action*. He was the *prophet of action*—the great hero—prophet of the kingdom of the ten tribes: "the grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced." His whole career was one of intense activity, during which he wrote, as if in fiery hieroglyphics, the awful character of the God he so diligently served. His mission was to proclaim the *living* God in opposition to Ahab's *dead*, senseless idols.

III. That the true prophet receives his commission from the Highest Authority. "Before whom I stand." How honourable, how sublime, how awful the position of him who stands to minister in the presence of God as His servant and ambassador! He receives his commission direct from the throne, he speeds on his errand with ready obedience, he is oppressed with the responsibility of his office, he utters his message as if standing in the presence of God. Elijah was "the loftiest, sternest spirit of the True Faith raised up face to face with the proudest and fiercest spirit of the old Asiatic paganism, against Jezebel rose up Elijah the Tishbite." Whenever the powers of darkness appear incarnate in some such ruling personage as Jezebel, with her hosts of Baal and Asherah prophets, then God provides an incarnation of his Divine Spirit and power, with suitable signs and wonders to confuse and confound the ministers of Satan. Such an incarnation was Elijah. The power that may be exerted by an individual life is something appalling, especially when it derives its inspiration direct from heaven. Lord Rochester fled from Fenelon, crying, "If I stay here any longer, I shall become a Christian in spite of myself." The greatest power over humanity to-day is spiritual power.

IV. That the true prophet is commissioned to announce the judgments of God against prevalent iniquity. "There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word." 1. *Jehovah has absolute control over all the elements of nature.* The worshippers of Baalim invested their deities with the lordship over the processes of nature; and the time had come when they must be undeceived. The prophet demonstrates that the dew and rain-clouds are not of Baal's giving, but are wholly in the hands of God, who can bestow or withhold their blessings according to His will. 2. *Jehovah can make the elements of nature the instruments of a nation's punishment which have been the means of its sin.* Israel had ignored God in nature and ascribed all power to Baal: nature is now to wield the rod which is to punish them for their apostasy and sin. It is to be shown how utterly fictitious is the control of their deities over the dew and the rain, and how terrible is the judgment which Jehovah can impose by drying up the moisture of earth and sky. Drought was a punishment threatened against idolatry (Deut. xi. 16, 17); and in this particular instance the obstinacy of Ahab continued it for three years and a half. To Eastern and Southern nations the withholding of rain is the withholding of pleasure, of sustenance, of life itself. It is only in abject distress and suffering that man can see the falseness and vanity of the idols in which he has so blindly trusted.

LESSONS:—1. *In the worst times God can raise up faithful men to do the most difficult and most needed work.* 2. *They who dare to be bold for God may safely trust to him for protection.* 3. *We learn how great may be the power of an individual life.*

The Life and Lessons of the Great Hebrew Reformer.

No story so bewitches us as the story of Elijah's life. His meteoric appearances, his lonely life spent hermit-like for the most part in caves and deserts, his fearlessness in the presence of Ahab and hostile priests, his sublime translation, his appearing 900 years after with our Lord; these and other circumstances invest his memory with a romantic interest such as belongs to no other prophet. He is a *prophet*, and some of the events in his life can only occur in a prophet's; but he is also a *man*, a man struggling against weaknesses like our own. His life will touch ours in many parts. Consider

I. The abruptness of his appearance on the arena of action. Where does the wild, stern-looking being come from? Who knows anything of his parents? What is his trade? But we wait in vain for an answer. This throws such a weirdness over him. There was design in sending the prophet with such abruptness into the presence of the king. Ahab had become hardened in sin. For a long time the prophets had been silent; Jehovah dumb. No stern protest had been lifted up; and, his conscience drugged, the man a mere puppet of his imperious queen and her fawning priests, Ahab can be aroused only by shattering peals of thunder, or a bursting volcano. Into his palace rushes the wild solemn man of the desert, and at the drowsy idolatrous king flings his stern threat. Thus God has to act still. To many a man the tenderest utterances of the Gospel have become as opiating drugs. A fire-brand, a thunderbolt, only will wake him up. Fingers of forked lightning must write fiery words of doom on his chamber walls. Ahab needed an Elijah.

II. The words suggested some idea of his previous training. Gilead must have had much to do with the character of the man. When he stood amid the crags of Mount Sinai unappalled by the bursts of thunder that shook the foundation of the hills, and shrunk not when the sheets of flame lit up the ravines, it was because he had been accustomed to similar impressive scenes in his own rugged land. It was a fitting cradle for such a spirit. The Highlands of Scotland have produced a race of men stern, hardy, daring; quite a contrast to the Lowlanders. The wide prairies of America tend to produce a race of Indians swift of foot, passionate in the chase, stealthy, and spurning settled abodes. Jehovah has found His Elijah in the right country. Very little is said about his personal aspects, but we shall always recognise him when he appears—the tawny, shaggy-haired man; around his shoulder the loose cape or mantle of sheep-skin, fastened at his breast with a leathern girdle. The appearance of the hitherto unknown prophet suggests—

III. How God had been steadily preparing an instrument for His work. His eye rested upon the nation's sin, and away in the solitude of Gilead He was shaping the man who would be as a sweeping tornado in the land, who would be the Regenerator of His people, the mighty Reformer in Israel. The world's history illustrates the principle. Israel needs to be led out of Egypt. In the very palace of the Pharaohs is young Moses being prepared as the future leader of Israel. God looks with holy anger upon the corruption of the Church of Rome, but in secret He is fitting the brave, heroic miner's son to shatter the huge fabric of superstition. To turn this principle round, and look on the other side, it conveys encouragement to God's people. To them, when in trouble, an Elijah of *deliverance* shall appear. A soldier whipped for a trifle, leaped from his ship into the heavy sea. A large albatross swooped like magic down at the man. In his death struggle, he seized the monstrous bird, and was thus kept afloat until aid arrived. Over-

whelmed in the water, there may be an albatross overhead to help the Christian. God may be preparing in secret an Elijah, not to speak words of fire as to Ahab, but to be a *deliverer*. This mention of Thisbe and Gilead suggests—

IV. From what obscurity the Lord brought the mighty prophet. No rabbi or learned doctor does God produce as the great instrument to effect His purpose, but a "Lay Preacher from the Highlands of Gilead." One likes to think how God employs the lowly, and works out his plans through the obscure. He is constantly rebuking us for thinking a place must be so many miles square, a man must have such an amount of brain, or wealth, before he can work. A rock in mid ocean may prove a cage large enough to contain the proud eagle of France. A small smithy in Micklefield can produce a Sammy Hick, whose name shall be known and influence felt to the extremities of the land. Bethlehem is large enough for the Redeemer of a world to be born in. A fisherman's craft is respectable enough to produce a Peter. *Even an insignificant obliterated Thisbe can send forth an Elijah!—(The Lay Preacher* for 1874).

GERM NOTES ON VERSE 1.

— A strange speech, certainly, to be reported of a man of whom as yet we have heard nothing. What had been passing in his mind up to that day, what he had to do with Ahab, how he came to think that dew or rain would obey his commands, we are not told. We are to judge of these things as we can. Our only help for judging of them lies in the words themselves. And there is the secret—"As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand." Here we have the key to the education and faith of Elijah, as well as to his relation with the king of Israel. "I have learnt that there is a Lord God of Israel, and that He lives, and that I am in His presence. I am sure that He is my Guide, and Teacher, and Judge; I am sure that He is the Guide, and Teacher, and Judge of this land and of its king. And this, Ahab, is just what thou dost not believe, just what thou, by thine acts, art denying. Thou believest in a Lord, or in many lords, far off from thee, exercising no government over thy actions, enforcing no duties upon thee towards thy subjects; a lord seated somewhere in the clouds, or on the summit of some hill; a cloud-compeller, a giver of dew or rain when your offerings please him, or when of mere sovereignty he chooses to do it. And I tell you that it is not this lord or these lords who send rain and dew; but that it is *the* God of you and of your fathers, the God who has ordained the course of seasons, who has appointed summer and winter, seed-time and harvest; who has appointed you to till the land upon which His rain descends and His sun shines; who claims first of all your trust and your obedience, since though you stand, as I stand, before Him, it is not your eyes that will tell you of Him; you must believe in Him if you would know Him. And as a sign and witness that it is even so, I declare to you, that the rain and the dew shall not come except at the word of me, a poor, insignificant, unknown man, by whom it pleases God to declare what He is, and what the being whom He has formed in His image is meant to be." Herein consists the force of this audacious sentence. It at once proclaims that relation between the unseen God and the spirit of man which Jezebel's priests by their services, and Ahab by his tyrannical acts, were alike setting at nought.—*Maurice.*

— Men in general have never been willing to recognize, and are still unwilling to recognize the fact, that need and misery upon earth stand in the closest relation to their conduct towards God; that through their need they may be called back to Him whom they have forsaken, and feel what it is when God

withdraws His hand, when they are left to themselves, when the Almighty withholds His gifts and blessings, and sends His punishments and plagues. The God of Israel is the living God, because He has spoken to Israel and has, through His Word, revealed Himself to them (Psa. cxlvii. 19, 20). God has spoken unto us by His son, the image of His being, and has revealed Himself in Him much more gloriously to us; therefore Christendom knows no other living God than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who can venture to say that he stands before God? He who, like Elijah, has firm faith, is unconditionally obedient to the Word of God, and fearlessly and courageously pursues the path God has prescribed for him.—*Menken.*

— **National apostasy and national chastisement.** Far away among the craggy glens of Gilead the prophet has become acquainted with the wickedness of the court and the people. Ah! there was one faithful heart who mourned over a nation's sin, and took it, where we ought to take our country's sins, into the presence of God. I. *National chastisement following upon national apostasy.* Does this surprise us? If an individual commit an infamous crime and escape punishment here, there awaits him a stern avenger among the shadows of the world to come. But there cannot be a wholesale retribution dealt out to a nation or tribe in that future state. Prosperity attends upon a virtuous nation, or fell-ruin overwhelms a degenerate one *here.* No kingdom ever perished through its high-toned morality. 1. This punishment *was not arbitrary and prejudiced.* The law pronounced it ages before this threat, if the people forsook God (Lev. xxvi. 19; Deut. xi. 16). No calamity came from spite or caprice. Jehovah knows nothing of the despicable venom of some human hearts when He deals in severity with men. 2. The punishment threatened *was adapted to the special character of the nation's sin.* Baal was worshipped as the source of fruitful harvest. Now there is to be a test of strength between God and His rival Baal. If drought and barrenness succeed the prophet's words, that will be a tangible proof of the impotence of their favourite idol. This is God's method still. The punishment sent often suits with terrible appropriateness the sin committed. II. *These words reveal the source of the prophet's holy boldness.* "As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand." He has a deep conviction that he is the servant of Jehovah. He is powerfully conscious of the continual presence of the Divine Being. Every Christian should have a conviction of being summoned to his particular work in the church. Here was the prophet's *incentive to faithfulness.* Moving about in the presence of the Holy One would have a salutary effect upon him. To one conscious of standing, living before the Holy God, as if he were always in the Holy of Holies, irreverence, unfaithfulness, would be exceptionally aggravated. Let the thought of "standing before God," in the home, behind the counter, and in the exchange, be an incentive to faithfulness.

LESSONS:—1. *The influence of a man in position. Ahab's idolatry had led the nation astray.* 2. *Learn to identify yourself with the nation's conditions, and make it a subject for prayer.—The Lay Preacher.*

— The unusual efflux of miraculous energy at this time is suitable to the unusual energy and—may we not say, evoked by it?—God mercifully adapting His gifts to men's needs. It is not here as in legendary histories. There the supernatural diminishes as the writer descends the stream of time and comes nearer to his own day. Here miracles are abundant or scanty without any reference to time; but in very evident proportion to the spiritual necessities of the people.—*Speaker's Comm.*

— Suddenly Elijah appears before us in the narrative as he appeared in his lifetime before Ahab and the children of Israel. Suddenly he appears, like Melchizedec, and suddenly he disappears, "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of

days, nor end of life." Not unnaturally did the ancient rabbis believe him to be the fiery Phineas returned to earth, or an angel hovering on the outskirts of the world. Not unnaturally have the Mussulman traditions confounded him with the mysterious being, the Immortal one, the Eternal Wanderer, who appears ever and anon to set right the wrongs of earth and repeat the experience of ages past. Not unnaturally did the mediaeval alchemists and magicians strive to trace up their dark arts to Elijah the Tishbite, the Father of Alchemy. The other prophets—Moses, Samuel, Elisha, Isaiah—were constantly before the eyes of their countrymen. But Elijah they saw only by partial and momentary glimpses.—*Stanley.*

— Peculiar and hopeless as the exigency in Israel appeared, the Lord found a man fit for it—a man fitted beyond all others, by the force of his character, his grasp of faith, and his fearless spirit, to "stem the torrent of a faithless age." This man was Elijah the Tishbite. He was one of the most extraordinary characters mentioned in the Bible. Great evils require great remedies; extraordinary diseases, extraordinary physicians; gigantic corruptions, gigantic reformers. And such was Elijah, who in his gifts and qualities assumes a figure scarcely human from its gigantic proportions, and towers aloft like one of the sons of Anak among common men. He was such stuff as the heathen made their gods of; and had he appeared in a heathen country he would have come down to us as scarcely less than a god, side by side, perhaps, with Hercules, instead of being only something more than a prophet. There are two sorts of prophets—prophets of deeds, prophets of words. Of the latter the greatest is doubtless Isaiah; of the former, there has not been among men born of women any greater than Elijah.—*Kitto.*

— Israel had never such a king as Ahab for impiety; never so miraculous a prophet as Elijah. He comes in like a tempest, who went out in a whirlwind. I do not so much wonder at the boldness of Elijah as at his power. Yea, who so sees his power, can no whit wonder at his boldness: how could he but be bold to the face of a man, who was thus powerful with God? While he knows himself a prophet, he remembers to be a man. He doth not therefore arrogate his power as his own, but published it as his master's. This restraint must be "according to his word," and that word was from a higher mouth than his. Man only can denounce what God will execute, which, when it is once revealed, can no more fail than the Almighty Himself.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 2-7.

The Teachings of Solitude.

Elijah had become the most popular man in Israel. His strange, abrupt entrance upon the scene, and the terrible import of his message, tended to fasten all eyes upon him, and to raise him into a position of personal importance. But it was a popularity not to be envied. It was full of peril. It raised up a number of enemies. It was perhaps a temptation to the prophet himself. God called him away into retirement, and amid the rocky solitudes of Cherith, with its solitary brook, he was to learn lessons of humility, of patience, and of faith.

I. Solitude affords protection from threatened peril. "Hide thyself by the brook Cherith" (verse 3). The enraged and deluded Ahab clamoured for the life of the loyal prophet, and the fawning parasites of Jezebel would fain have torn him in pieces. They ransacked every imaginable hiding-place in the kingdom, but in vain. They are well hid whom God doth hide. Moses fled to Midian from the fury of the Egyptians, and was safely lodged there for forty

years. David found shelter from the malice of Saul among the fastnesses of Engedi; John the Evangelist, from persecution, in the Isle of Patmos; Luther, from his enemies, in the lonely castle of Wartburg, in the Forest of Thuringia; Tyndale, the first translator of the English Bible, was a fugitive in hiding at Marburg, Worms, Antwerp, and Cologne; John Knox, the Scottish Elijah, was several years a prisoner in the French galleys; and the great prophet of Gilead is sent to Cherith for safety and for culture. The faithful worker for God is scathless till his work is done.

II. Solitude is relieved by special manifestations of Divine care. "And the ravens brought him bread and flesh," &c. (verse 6). These words record an undoubted miracle, and there are fewer difficulties in believing the miracle than in trying to explain the transaction on natural grounds. The miracle is all the more impressive that ravens, the most voracious of birds, are the unfailing purveyors of the prophet. Since the raven is a carrion bird, and a devourer of all manner of dead flesh, some have wondered how Elijah could eat without scruple all that was brought to him; but they absurdly assume that ravens miraculously sent by Divine command would bring what was common or unclean. "When men disobey," says Wordsworth, "God reproves them by the obedience of the inferior creatures. The old world disbelieved God's warnings by Noah, and would not go into the ark, and so perished in the flood; but the inferior animals went in and were fed there. Balaam was rebuked for his disobedience by the ass on which he rode. The disobedient prophet (chap. xiii. 26) was slain by the lion which God sent from the forest, and which spared the ass and the carcase of the prophet. The disobedience of Ahab and Israel was rebuked by the obedience of the ravenous birds in bringing food to Elijah. Jonah fled from God, and God sent the whale to bring him back to prophesy against Nineveh. The lions spared Daniel when his colleagues would have slain him. Christ was with the wild beasts in peace (Mark i. 13) when He was about to be rejected by mankind." Jehovah has all nature under His control, and it is an easy thing for Him to make it minister to the necessities of His tried and faithful servants. He who provides meat for the fowls of the air will make the fowls of the air provide meat for man, rather than his dependence on God shall be disappointed.

III. Solitude often severely tests the genuineness of our faith (verse 7). A period of enforced inactivity is most difficult to endure, especially to an ardent nature. Why am I doomed to this gloomy solitude? what good purpose can it serve? Time, opportunities, strength to labour, are all passing away unimproved. Ought I not to break away from this tedious imprisonment, and rush at once into the conflict that on every hand demands the stalwart arm and the enterprizing soul? Is there no testimony to bear, no work to be done, no warfare to wage? Such are the questions sometimes asked by the solitary recluse. The restraint tries our faith, while on the other hand faith generates strength to bear the strain. Nor is a time of retirement without its suffering. "It came to pass that the brook dried up." The lessening flow of the life-giving stream and its final exsiccation was an additional trial of faith and source of suffering. It is in extremity that our faith becomes more daring, and yields the most solid comfort. "Good bye, dear Lucy," said a drowning youth to his betrothed, after they had both held on to the last possible point of endurance to a piece of the floating wreckage of a foundered steamer; "we shall soon meet in heaven!"

IV. Solitude is an opportunity for mental and moral discipline. It was to Elijah a time of deep and pensive musing. He thought of God, on whose bounty he was so absolutely dependent. He thought of Israel, its delusions, its vices, its sufferings, its needs. He thought of himself and the work to

which he was called. He strove to rectify defects, and sought to brace himself up for the conflict before him. He discovered the true source of his strength, and was enabled more completely to consecrate his whole being to the service of God. Most public men have their *Cheriths* of retirement and preparation. When the disciples of our Lord returned from their first mission, and reported all they had done and taught, He said unto them, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile" (Mark vi. 30, 31). In this way temptations to pride and self-sufficiency are conquered, and lessons of humility and self-abasement are learnt. "The sufficiency of my merit," said Augustine, "is to know that my merit is not sufficient."

"The bird that soars on highest wing
Builds on the ground her lowly nest;
And she that doth most sweetly sing,
Sings in the shade when all things rest.
Nearest the throne itself must be
The footstool of humility."—*Herbert.*

LESSONS:—1. *The withdrawal of a public instructor is a calamity to a nation.* 2. *Solitude is fraught with trial and sorrow.* 3. *Seasons of solitude should be diligently improved.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 2-7. **Characteristics of a child-like faith.** 1. It accepts the Word of God without questioning (verse 2). 2. It flinches not in the presence of the severest demands (verse 3). 3. It is not staggered by apparent improbabilities (verse 4). 4. It is prompt in obedience (verse 5). 5. Enjoys the fulfilment of the Divine promise (verse 6). 6. Fails not when most severely tried (verse 7).

— **Elijah at Cherith.** 1. *Men must be prepared to accept the consequences of their obedience to God.* We do not always see such consequences, and when they come upon us they very often find us unprepared to meet them. Obedience to God often exposes men to hatred, scorn, ridicule, opposition, inconvenience, loss of trade, loss of liberty, and even life itself. But when we choose God's service we choose these consequences, and when they come they should not deter us from our duty. 2. *That God makes provision for the exigencies into which obedience to the Divine commands may bring His servants.* He imposes no task, but He provides strength for its accomplishment. Whatever may be the consequences of their obedience, He will not leave His servants to meet them alone. He goes before His people, providing for their necessities—strength in weakness and temptation, light in darkness, comfort in sorrow, consolation in bereavement, hope in death. 3. *This provision is frequently not made known to the obedient until their need is pressing.* It is after we have entered upon our chosen path of duty, and the difficulties begin to appear, that God reveals the provision He has made to enable us to meet them. It is when the darkness gathers around us that the light of heaven appears. When the drought comes upon the land, God will not forsake His people; but His voice shall be heard directing them to Cherith, where their need shall be amply provided for.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

Verse 3. **Obscurity.** 1. Repugnant to some men. 2. Sometimes the appointment of God. 3. Necessary for self-discipline. 4. A means of safety.

— Even that God sends him to hide his head who could as easily have protected as nourished him. He that wilfully stands still to catch dangers tempteth God instead of trusting Him.

— "Get thee hence, and hide thyself." A hard word for a heroic man

like Elijah, who had threatened the king and the whole people, and must now flee and expose himself to scorn and contempt. Going away often requires more self-denial than remaining. Every man who has done anything great in the kingdom of God has passed a long time in retirement and solitude. But to every faithful Christian also the command has come, hide thyself, go into the stillness and solitude. The hidden man of the heart, with soft, still spirit, does not thrive in the perpetual tumult and babbling noise of the world. There is no man who has not felt the need of some time and place to collect his thoughts, and to be alone with his God; they who avoid such are not fit for the kingdom of God.—*Lange.*

Verse 5. He went in faith along the hard, dark path into the wilderness, as a genuine son of Abraham, the father of all the faithful, who knew that without faith it is impossible to please God, and that man can offer to God no higher and nobler homage than to believe in His promises. Who so chooses the dear God, and always hopes in Him, him will He sustain wonderfully in all need and affliction (Psa iv. 4; cxlvii. 5). Go whithersoever thou wilt, means shall not fail thee thy deed is pure blessing, thy course pure light.—*Menken.*

Verse 6. Divine Providence. 1. Cares for the most solitary. 2. Has absolute control over all supplies. 3. Never disappoints the believer. 4. May sometimes make use of ravens—*i. e.*, abandoned and godless men—to help the children of God.

Verse 7. Faith tried. 1. By the gradual failure of that on which life depends. 2. By the suffering caused by privation. 3. By the uncertainty of the future. 4. Is ever rewarded by timely relief.

— The prophet feels the smart of this drought which he had denounced. It is no unusual thing with God to suffer his own children to be inwrapped in the common calamities of offenders. He makes difference in the use and issue of their stripes, not in the infliction. The corn is cut down with the weeds, but to a better purpose.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 8-16.

Rescue in Extremity.

I. That a time of extremity reveals the Divine source of our daily comforts. The water of the brook on which Elijah had depended for daily refreshment gradually diminished, and at length altogether disappeared, and the prophet was again reminded of his absolute dependence on God for hourly sustenance. The greatest blessings are apt to be regarded with indifference because of the constancy of their supply. The daily return of the sunlight, the equal diffusion of the air we breathe, the regular beat of the life-pulse, the abundant yield of the soil on which we tread, are bestowed with such uniformity and faithfulness, that there is danger we should forget the great source of them all. When we are deprived for a time of the most ordinary blessings of life, then do we become vividly conscious of their former presence and of their unspeakable value. Every new day should be vocal with new thanksgivings and praises for the new mercies which it brings.

II. That a time of extremity induces a spirit of ready obedience. "So he arose and went to Zarephath" (verse 10). Elijah might be tempted to question: Why may not the same Divine power which sends the ravens with food keep the Cherith in perpetual flow? And if I must remove, why not go back to Israel rather than into Phœnicia, the idolatrous home of Jezebel, whose

enormities I am commissioned to punish? But the instinct of obedience was stronger than all such questionings; and that instinct was sharpened by the difficulties in which he found himself. To remain was to perish, and to obey opened the only prospect of relief and sustenance. "Servants rise when the bell rings," says the proverb; and Elijah at once set out on his long and adventurous journey. He was like Israel in the wilderness. "At the *commandment* of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the *commandment* of the Lord they journeyed." So God often leads his people out by a way that they know not, and the reluctance to follow the Divine leading is overcome by the utter perplexity of the circumstances into which they are sometimes brought, and their inability to discover a better way than the one indicated. It is the triumph of self-surrender to God when the believer can say—

> Nor will I hear, nor will I speak,
> Of any other will but Thine.

III. That a time of extremity encourages faith in God amid the most unfavourable appearances (verses 10-12). The prophet was to be dependent on a woman, and she a Gentile, when there were many women in Israel any of whom would have counted it a coveted honour to minister to the wants of the persecuted champion of Jehovah; a *widow* woman, and a widow woman in such abject poverty that she and her emaciated son were reduced to the last point of starvation (verse 12). It seemed very unlikely that a woman in whose home famine had wrought such havoc should be the future hostess of the famishing prophet. But Elijah, undaunted by the ghastly and unpromising appearance of things, had faith in God; he who quailed not in the presence of Ahab and Jezebel, yielded not in the presence of improbabilities which were even more difficult to confront. True faith triumphs over the most forbidding circumstances; above all external things it sees God and His all-conquering promise. Abraham "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform" (Rom. iv. 20, 21). Faith eats its way through all Alps of opposition.

IV. That a time of extremity affords opportunity for the most signal display of Divine power (verses 12-16). 1. *It reveals how God has His hidden ones in the most unlikely places.* This Gentile woman was not ignorant of Jehovah, and she at once recognized Elijah as His prophet. "As the Lord *thy* God liveth" (verse 12). She was probably a believer (Luke iv. 26), however imperfect might be her faith, and the narrative shows she was capable of the most disinterested kindness, and of the most implicit confidence in the word of God (verses 14, 15). "Phenicia was the last place in the world to have found a worshipper of the Lord, the living God. It was also the last place in the world to have found an Elijah. And yet both are here—the one a lily among thorns, the other, in the quaint but fine thought of Lightfoot, the first apostle to the Gentiles." The rarest virtues are sometimes found in the most unexpected places. During the last journey of Livingstone, the veteran African traveller, he was compelled, in consequence of a tribal war, to change his route, and pass through a country where no rain had fallen, and the grass, mostly burnt off, left a surface covered with black ashes, from which the heat radiated as from a furnace. Yet, out of this hard, hot surface, *the flowers would persist in coming*. So amid the moral wastes of heathendom, where the soil is hard and black, and apparently unfertile, and where our missionaries have toiled so long with such earnestness and devotion, the delicate flowers of Christian virtues have pushed their way, displaying their modest beauty, and scattering their hallowing fragrance—foretokens of the coming period when the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert rejoice and blossom as the

rose" (Isa. xxxv. 1) 2. *It reveals the boundless resources of Jehovah in supplying the needs of His people* (verse 16). With God nothing is impossible, and rather than His people should perish He will work a miracle. The same power that multiplied the loaves and fishes to the multitude on the shores of Galilee could, with equal ease, replenish the meal barrel and oil cruse in the home of the Sareptan widow "So that," writes Maurice, "*the* person from whom Elijah was to receive sustenance, and whom, as a return for that favour, he was to teach trust in the Lord God of Israel that her barrel of meal should not waste, neither her cruse of oil fail, was a woman of that very country from which Jezebel had come—the very country from which the Baal worship had been imported. The Lord God of the nation, then, was one in whom the weak and poor of all nations might confide, one from whom they might ask their daily bread, and on whom they might cast their heaviest cares." God will be no debtor to them who trust Him in extremity, or who show kindness to His servants.

LESSONS:—1. *God is not indifferent to the wants and sufferings of His people.* 2. *A time of temporal straitness is often one of richest spiritual blessing.* 3. *We cannot grieve God more than by distrusting Him.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 8-16. **The barrel of meal and the cruse of oil.** Learn from this incident: I. *The uncertainty of earthly comforts.* When Elijah went to Cherith he would never dream of that brook becoming exhausted. He would settle down there till the drought passed away. But, when least expecting it, the word of the Lord came: "Arise, get thee to Zarephath." Cherith, with all its pleasant associations, had to be left. What a picture of human life! How many are there of whose worldly comforts it may be said: "After a while the brook dried up." One man is settled in life, with circumstances all that could be desired, and he contemplates the future with pleasure; but unexpectedly something arises—bank failure or commercial crisis—which tells him that the brook is dried up, and he has to leave his Cherith. Another looks with pride and hope upon a child—his pleasure and joy flow from that child—but, unnoticed, disease settles upon it and takes it away. So with earthly comforts. They are uncertain, and do not warrant the eagerness with which they are sought, or the value with which they are invested. II. *The certainty of God's care.* God made provision for Elijah at Zarephath before He commanded him to leave Cherith. Decay and change may characterise all our earthly comforts, but they do not characterise God; He remains the same, and His care can never fail. Many changes are permitted to our circumstances, to lead us to more implicit confidence in the unchangeable God. III. *Godly generosity shall not lose its reward.* This woman had a truly generous spirit, which was bounded only by her means. She listened readily to Elijah's request, and showed a spirit willing to accede to it; and her generosity secured her abundance. God blessed her house for entertaining His servant, as He blessed the house of Obed Edom for sheltering the ark.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

Verses 10-13. Now here was a demand upon the faith of this woman—from a foreign man and a foreign God—as large as any exacted from the great prophet himself. See how it stands: First, she was to make up her provisions for Elijah, trusting that, as he had said, more would then come miraculously to supply her own wants. What a trial! What would the bird in the hand worth two in the bush principle say to this? Who could have it in his heart to blame her had she declined to run what was, under the circumstances, so hard a risk? Who would condemn her if she had discredited this stranger? How could

she know but that, after he had eaten up her precious bread, he might laugh in her face? Besides, was not his very anxiety to be served first of all very suspicious? Looked it not as if he were determined, at all hazards, to secure a meal for himself; and could we call it unreasonable had she asked for the proof first—which could be given as well before as after—that it should be as he had said? But nothing of this occurred. She went and did as Elijah had told her, and found the result as he had promised. This was faith of the true sort, heroic faith, the faith that asks no questions.—*Kitto.*

Verse 10. "So he arose and went to Zarephath." Compared with verse 15: Obedience to God. I. Should be prompt and unquestioning. II. Involves sacrifice and suffering. III. Is always rewarded with blessing.

Verse 12. Happy was it for this widow that she did not shut her hand to the man of God, that she was no niggard of her last handful; never corn or oil did so increase in growing as here in consuming. This barrel, this cruse of hers, had no bottom; the barrel of meal wasted not, the cruse of oil failed not. Behold, not getting, not saving, is the way to abundance, but giving. The mercy of God crowns our beneficence with the blessing of store. Who can fear want by a merciful liberality, when he sees the Sareptan had famished if she had not given, and by giving abounded? With what thankful devotion must this woman every day needs look upon her barrel and cruse, wherein she saw the mercy of God renewed to her continually? Doubtless her soul was no less fed by faith than her body by this supernatural provision.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 13. Fear not! Ah! how often has a child of God bemoaned—Now all is lost! I have nothing more, and know nothing more. The operations of the Spirit of God have ceased for me; the meal and oil are gone! And yet, where there is nothing more amid the night and the darkness, the morning brings something upon which one can live and find nourishment for the soul, although the time be miserable.—*Lange.*

Verse 15. It was one of those sudden recognitions of unknown kindred souls, one of those cross-purposes of Providence, which come in with a peculiar charm to chequer the commonplace course of ecclesiastical history. The Phœnician mother knew not what great destinies lay in the hand of that gaunt figure at the city gate, worn with travel, and famine, and drought. She obeyed only the natural instinct of humanity; but she saved in him the deliverer of herself and her son. It may be that this incident is the basis of the sacred blessing of the Prophet of prophets on those who, even by a cup of cold water, receiving a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward.—*Stanley.*

Verse 16. The same God who spoke by means of Elijah—The meal in the barrel shall not be wasted, and the oil in the cruse shall not fail—has also promised, as long as the earth lasts, seed-time and harvest, frost and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease (Gen. viii. 22). We are astonished at the little miracle in the cabin at Sarepta, but we pass over with indifference, and without attention, the large miracle.—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 17-24.

The Marvellous Power of an Intrepid Faith.

I. We see here how an intrepid faith may be sorely tried. 1. *By sudden and unexpected bereavement* (verse 17). The youth who had escaped from the merciless fangs of famine, and who, for some time, was sustained by a miracu-

lous supply of God, is smitten down with a mysterious disease, and, as it would appear, with appalling suddenness, expires. It is sad to lose our health, sad to lose our fortune, but it is sadder still to lose the loved ones of our hearth and home.

'Tis hard to lay our darling
Deep in the cold, damp earth;
His empty crib to see, his silent nursery,
Once gladsome with his mirth.

The thought of death gives a tinge of melancholy to every event of life, and reveals the frailty and transitoriness of all earthly things. The Roman Emperor who had commanded a world, exclaimed, when he came to die, "I was everything, and have found that everything is nothing." And yet, if it were something, in one moment death robs us of it all. No wonder that while complaining of life we turn away from death. "We live hating life, yet full of fear to die." And when death comes, slowly or suddenly, it tests the faith of the staunchest believer. 2. *By the spectacle of a bewildering sorrow* (verse 18). Only a mother knows a mother's grief. How ready we are, says Bishop Hall, to mistake the grounds of our afflictions, and to cast them upon false causes. The passionate mother cannot find whether to impute the death of her son but to the presence of Elijah, to whom she comes distracted with perplexity, not without an unkind challenge of him from whom she had received both that life she had lost and that she had: "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?" As if her son could not have died if Elijah had not been her guest, whereas her son had died but for him. Why should she think that the prophet had saved him from the famine to kill him with sickness? He who had appeased God towards her is suspected to have incensed him. This wrongful misconstruction was enough to move any patience. Elijah was of a hot and fiery temperament, and a strain was put upon his self-control. But his faith in God, and the sympathy roused within him for the afflicted widow, not only taught him forbearance, but made him the more anxious to do what he could to alleviate her anguish.

II. We see here how an intrepid faith is sustained and strengthened by earnest and importunate prayer (verses 19-21). This incident brings out for the first time in his history one of the most marked and powerful features of Elijah's character as *a man of prayer* He was personally deeply moved by the distress which this bereavement had brought into the widow's home; and his prayer is an urgent appeal to God, as a just and merciful and righteous Being. He pleaded for the restoration of life to the dead boy—a bold and hitherto unheard of request from the lips of mortal man! "We can imagine the Tishbite pacing up and down his little chamber in importunate, impassioned prayer; but yet with no doubt as to the result of his intercession. It was a mighty demand, indeed, for a mortal to make a request that had no previous parallel in praying lips. It was nothing short of this: that unassailable death be stormed in his own strongholds; that the iron crown be plucked from the head of the king of terrors. When Elijah *does* manifest faith, it is always of the noblest type." The higher exercises of faith are possible only to earnest, resolute, and incessant prayer.

III. We see here how an intrepid faith is honoured by a signal display of Divine power (verses 22, 23). This is the first recorded instance of a resurrection from the dead. Many suppose that this youth afterwards became the servant of Elijah (xviii. 43; xix. 3): and an old Jewish tradition identifies him with the prophet Jonah. "It was a proud thought for Greece that on one and the same day she gained the battle of Platæa on the land, and the battle of Mycalè on the sea. And what would be the grateful joy of this widow woman

that by one and the same agency, in the retirement of her home, and in a period of the severest national distress, in place of two victims there had been two victories—a victory over famine, a victory also over death." Nothing is impossible to believing prayer. If Elijah by his fervent supplications could bring about supernatural results, why should we fail in securing blessings within the ordinary sphere of nature, by the agency of prayer?

IV. We see here how an intrepid faith is the means of strengthening and confirming the weak (verse 24). This Sareptan widow believed in God before, but she is a stronger and more decided believer now. The miraculous replenishing of her store convinced her of the mercy and love of God, and the raising of her son from the dead gave her a still deeper insight into the Divine Majesty and power, and invested the mission of the prophet with a still more awful authority. The design of miracles is not for display, or to excite wonder, but for the confirmation of truth. The strongest faith sometimes gives way and needs heavenly support. Had this widow's son continued dead, her belief had been buried in his grave: notwithstanding her meal and oil, her soul had languished. The condescension of God provides new helps for our infirmities, and meets us on our own ground, that he may work out our faith and salvation. The onus of unbelief is thrown wholly on man. God takes care there shall be no lack of evidence for the encouragement and building up of faith.

LESSONS:—1. *Bereavement and sorrow intensify our sympathy with humanity.* 2. *The soul in its deepest suffering finds rest and consolation alone in God.* 3. *Faith in God achieves the grandest moral victories.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES

Verse 17-24. Raising the widow's son. 1. *No home exempt from the trials and sufferings of this life.* This widow would doubtless be looked upon with envy by her neighbours. They would think that in the midst of the distress suffered by them she was free and protected by an unseen hand from wretchedness and woe. But a deeper sorrow than they imagined was soon her portion. In looking upon some homes, we are apt to think they are strangers to the ordinary trials and sorrows of life. But there is no home that can exclude these. However well provided temporarily, however diligent and devoted in the path of Christian duty the inmates may be, still there comes to them, more or less, trial and suffering of one kind or another—affliction, disappointment, bereavement. To know this should prepare us to meet trials when they come. 2. *The deepest sorrow may be the instrument of our highest good.* Nothing could have been a greater affliction to this woman than the death of her son; but it gave God the opportunity of exercising His power in raising him from the dead. By means of this she was enlightened, and her faith in God confirmed. She was on the borderland of true faith before; now she enters into its fulness. "Now, *by this*, I know, &c." Many have been similarly blessed by trial and sorrow; they have obtained clearer and loftier views of God and stronger faith in Him. They have been raised up into a higher region of life and affection (Heb. xii. 11). 3. *An illustration of the power of prayer.* How differently would this woman regard prayer to Jehovah to what she had done before! She would see that it was the way of access to God and of prevailing with Him; and lead her to imitate that earnest and confident prayer of Elijah which brought her son back from the regions of the dead. We have many rich and valuable illustrations of the power of prayer in Holy Writ and in our own history, which should lead us to a more earnest and persevering use of it.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

Verse 18. The voice of conscience. 1. Is heard in the midst of calamity. 2. Is an unfailing remembrancer of sin. 3. May mislead as to the reasons for which calamity is permitted to overtake us. 4. Should be listened to with a view of moral improvement.

Verses 19-21. Behold this great man in his chamber, alone with the corpse of that fair child. See how vehemently he strides up and down, gradually working himself up to the height of the great demand which gleams before his thought, a demand which had not crossed the mind of man since the beginning of the world, only because no man before had had the same degree of faith—the faith to deem it possible that the dead might be restored to life at man's urgent prayer. It is done. His purpose is taken. The child may live. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. It is as easy for Him to give back life as to take it; and He will do this if asked with adequate faith. Elijah knew that men too often expect to move the mountains by such faith as suffices not to shake the mole-hills; and that because, from the insufficiency of the means, the hoped-for results do not follow, the power of faith is disparaged. But he felt the true mountain-moving faith heaving strong within him, and he gave it unrestrained vent. He threw himself upon the corpse, as if, in the vehement energy of his will, to force his own life into it; and he cried with mighty and resistless urgency to God to send back to this cold frame the breath he had taken away. Faith conquered. It was *adequate*, and therefore irresistible.—*Kitto.*

Verse 22. Even if the Lord do no miracle, there are still a thousand ways and means by which He sends comfort and strength, or help and salvation, in answer to the believing prayer of His faithful servants. Each granting of prayer is indeed a miracle, and never is *one* humble, believing prayer uttered in vain—no, not even when it is refused.—*Menken.*

— The illimitable power of God. 1. Has absolute control over life and death. 2. Can accomplish whatever does not imply a contradiction: it is never uselessly employed. 3. Is exerted in answer to believing prayer. 4. Confirms the faith of the wavering.

Verse 23. He who testified that man did not live from hour to hour by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, testified also to a stranger from the commonwealth of Israel that God can give back that life which He has taken away. The poor woman of Zidon learnt the amazing lesson that the power which she had looked upon as emphatically the destroyer, is warring with death, and can win a victory over it, not for some great and holy person, but for her whose sins had been brought to remembrance by the presence of the prophet and the death of her child —*Maurice.*

Verse 24. Real knowledge of the truth. I. *There is a kind of knowledge of scriptural things which leaves a man perfectly satisfied with himself.* This widow seems to have been acquainted with the God of Israel, in the way of providence, and seems to have known Elijah to be a prophet by his dress; and her obedience appears to have been of that kind which springs from the intellectual knowledge that a man has, that God is almighty; that, being perfect, He is therefore faithful; and that what He says must come to pass; but it does not seem to have been that which springs from a heart knowledge of Him as a just God and a Saviour, who "pardoneth iniquity," and which knowledge begets an appropriation of God as "my God" to the heart—for, you observe, she says, "As the Lord *thy* God liveth." She does not say, "As the Lord my God liveth!" This lesson of knowing God as our God she has yet to learn. And this she was to learn in the school of affliction—a furnace in which many of God's children are chosen and made to know Him. There are many persons in the

same state as the widow of Zarephath before the prophet came to her. Like her, they have heard of God; they have heard that there is a God; they do not deny the truth and power of God; they believe that the Word of God is true; they do not hesitate to render a sort of outside obedience to His commands. We find them continually speaking calmly of death, just as this woman did; but all the peace which apparently accompanies this calm statement about death is false. It arises from ignorance of sin. When this is brought vividly and clearly to remembrance, then their peace flies away, because there is no real acquaintance with Christ. They know the inconvenience of sin, they know the disgrace of it; but as to the real nature of sin, they are ignorant of it, because no man ever can abide under a knowledge of the nature of sin without fleeing to Jesus for the remedy that God has provided in Him.

II. *This kind of knowledge is shown not to be a real acquaintance with truth, by impatience under affliction.* "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" By some this is understood to express her deep sense of the vast difference between herself and the prophet, and the feeling she entertained in consequence; as when Peter, astonished at the marvellous draught of fishes, exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But it seems as if the words are expressive of a feeling of impatience of the sorrow which had come upon her, in consequence, as she thought, of the presence of the prophet: as if she had said, "If this be the consequence of thy visit, would I had never seen thee." She forgets God's goodness, and thinks only of her trial. Are there not many who go on for years partaking of God's bounty, who are favoured above thousands around them, but who have no knowledge of the state of their own hearts, and who, when the Lord afflicts them, are irritated, and think themselves hardly dealt by; or when, by the preaching of the Word of God, He graciously opens their eyes to the condition of their hearts, are impatient at those doctrines, those statements, which God frequently makes use of to affirm His purpose of love? This widow saw in Elijah not the servant of the Lord, so much as one who brought her sins to remembrance, and slew her son; and this she could not bear. Trials which mellow and ripen the saint, irritate and enrage the graceless sinner; and heart-searching preaching leads men to speak evil of the way of truth. This woman could not have talked so calmly of dying if she had known what her sins were; but when she was stripped of self-confidence, of all those false hopes which were dear to her as her son—and when God calls upon men now-a-days to relinquish their all to Him, in His love He will take them off from every false confidence, till they are left like the childless widow, with their sins staring them in the face, and all their creature-comforts gone, stripped and made bare by God's Holy Spirit, then they are alive to the Scripture truth that they are in themselves "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

III. *It is generally under a deep sense of sin, or through deep waters, that God leads to real acquaintance with the truth.* "And he said unto her, Give me thy son: and he took him out of her bosom." The dead son she can part with readily; she is brought so low, she is willing to do anything for a remedy. She sees matters cannot be worse, and therefore she is willing to listen to any remedy which may make them better. And that is just the point which a man is brought to who receives the Lord Jesus with thankfulness. He sees things cannot be worse; he sees a truth which the world is very slow to believe, that there is no such thing as exaggerating the evil of sin. And when the Lord says to the convicted sinner, "Give me thine heart," that heart which is dead to every hope but that which the Gospel gives, it is immediately yielded up. As God gave

back life to the widow's son, so in regeneration does God give back that principle of eternal life which was forfeited in Adam; God breathes into man's nostrils the breath of life, and man becomes a living soul again, in contradistinction to what he is naturally, in Scripture language, "dead in trespasses and sins." Thus was the widow taught what she did not know, perhaps, in heart before, and by means which were utterly at variance with her best affections; and thus also our proud hearts are humbled, and made to know that those doctrines and statements of the Word of God which they long scoffed at are truth.

LESSONS.—1. There is such a thing as being acquainted with the Word, and obeying it in a certain outward sense, and being calm in the prospect of death, and yet not knowing that Word experimentally to be truth.

2. Until we are brought to know the evil of sin, we shall be ignorant of the spiritual meaning of the Word of God, and in that degree resist the truth.

3. Until we yield ourselves wholly to God, we shall never know the truth savingly, or find peace really.—*The Pulpit.*

— We pass through much grief and humiliation before, with joyful assurance, we can say to Him who is greater than Elijah, Now know I that thou art Christ, the Son of the Living God. Only by means of individual experience does each man come to the blessed confession that the Word of the Lord is truth. He only is a servant of God in whose mouth the Word of the Lord is truth, not mere appearance and sham.—*Lange.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

ELIJAH'S CONTEST WITH AHAB AND BAAL.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. *After* many days . . . **in the third year**—In Luke iv. 25, James v. 17, the drought is said to have lasted "for the space of three years and six months." In the natural order of things, rains fell regularly in March and October—"the early and latter rains." Their cessation might be dated either from the March when the last rain fell, or from the October when the rain first failed to fall. The later reckoning would make the period six months less than the former, yet both computations would be equally correct. Verse 2. There was a sore famine in Samaria—"Entirely without reference to the Old Testament, Menandros (*Josephus*, Antiq. viii. 13.2) makes mention of a severe drought lasting for a year under the Syrian king Ithobal, a contemporary of Ahab" (*Ewald*). Verse 4. Obadiah took an hundred prophets—*i. e.*, scholars in the schools of the prophets. This indicates that they must have been numerous, even though Jezebel had sought to exterminate them, with all that connected Jehovah's name and worship with the land. Hid them in a cave—Most probably in the clefts of Mount Carmel (*Winer*). Verse 7. Art thou that my lord Elijah?—*Luther* translates the words, הַאַתָּה זֶה, "*Art thou not my lord Elijah?*" The *Sept.* renders them, *εἰ σὺ εἶ αὐτός κύριέ μου Ἠλία.* But Obadiah was in no doubt; "he *knew him.*" It is rather a question of wonder (*Keil*). "Art thou here?" Verse 12. The Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not—Either by a supernatural bodily transition (Acts viii. 39), or by an inward impulse from God (Matt. iv. 1). Cannot find thee—The effectual secresy of Elijah for so long a time, though search had everywhere been made for him (verse 10), convinced Obadiah that Elijah could hide from discovery. Verse 15. As the Lord of hosts liveth—"The צְבָאוֹת with יְהוָה elevates the solemnity of the oath" (*Keil*). Verse 17. Art thou he that troubleth Israel?—עֹכֵר, to bring into trouble. The words may be rendered, Art thou there, O troubler of Israel? They mean, Do I at last meet thee, thou bringer of trouble upon Israel? Verse 18. Thou hast followed Baalim—*The* Baalim; not alluding to the numerous images and statues of Baal, but the various personifications of that god—Baal-Berith, Baal-Zebul (*Winer*). Verse 19. Prophets of Baal, &c.—Soothsayers and oracle priests. Groves—Asherah. Baal and Astarte were the male and female divinities. Jezebel was the patroness of the prophets of this female divinity. Verse 21.

How long halt ye, &c.—From the root סָעַף, to divide, dissever. In Psalm cxix. 113, the same word is rendered by "vain thoughts," *i.e.*, double-minded, ambiguous. The *Vulg.* translates here, *Usquequo claudicatis in duas partes?* To go from one to another. Notwithstanding all Ahab and Jezebel had done to exterminate Jehovah-worship, there was vacillation between Jehovah and Baal—not decision against Jehovah, only indecision. Verse 24. The God that answereth by fire—A specially favourable test, for Baal was the fire-god, the sun. Verse 25. For ye are many—An ironical taunt. You are the more numerous religious party in Israel, and, as being in the ascendant, you have the right of first choice! Yet, O how near the moment of their reverse from this ascendancy! Verse 26. Leaped upon the altar—The pantomimic heathenish dance. Verse 27. Cry aloud; for he is a god—A scathing satire, a most mocking taunt. *Talking*, or meditating; *pursuing*, gone astray. Verse 28. Cut themselves after their manner—וַיִּתְגֹּדְדוּ means more than a mere puncturing or scratching. The superstition existed that the blood of priests was specially virtuous in constraining the deity to action; and now they were *in extremis*. Verse 32. Two measures of seed—The measurement is not very definite, and cannot be conjectured with any accuracy, but it must have been both deep and wide. Verse 38. The fire of the Lord fell—אֵשׁ־יְהוָה does not mean lightning (*comp.* Lev. ix. 24). Verse 40. Slew them there—For they were deadly criminals, perilous to the theocracy, and had incurred the penalty of death (Deut. xvii. 2-4; xiii. 12). Verse 41. Sound of abundance of rain—The cause of the curse of drought being now removed, the blessing came quick. Verse 42. Cast himself down upon the earth—Betook himself to prayer. This kept him from becoming elate, and indicated his deep concern for the mercy of God to come upon the stricken land. Verse 46. Hand of the Lord—Supernatural energy, and a Divine ecstacy. **Entrance of Jezreel**—Where Ahab had a summer palace (xxi. 1).—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-18.

Ahab the Type of a Weak and Wicked King.

I. He was the occasion of prolonged national distress (verses 1, 2). For three years and a-half Israel lay gasping under a parching drought, with all its attendant horrors of famine (Luke iv. 25; James v. 17). Everywhere was desolation and barrenness; the soil seemed scorched up with the wrath of God. The labours of the field had ceased, and the joy of the harvest and vintage was hushed. The market-places were empty and silent, and the cottages were occupied by thin, bony forms, in which the pulse of life but faintly throbbed. The bright-plumaged birds had fled, and none but carrion fowl hovered in the air, or fattened on the carcases that were strewn in ghastly plenty on the plains. The calamity was so great and widespread that the indolent and reckless Ahab was compelled to bestir himself, and, in harmony with the simple manners of many Eastern monarchs, went in search of provender. And yet the thought never seemed to dawn on the mind of the king that *he* was a principal cause of the suffering he everywhere witnessed. Unhappy, indeed, is the people whose sovereign is both weak and wicked!

II. He was served by a God-fearing officer. It is no unusual coincidence for a Godless king to desire God-fearing men for his ministers and counsellors. Many a prince, though himself no Christian, holds in his service a Christian, and esteems him more highly than the others who are *not* Christian. 1. *Obadiah's piety was practical* (verses 3, 4, 13). He protected the prophets of the Lord from the persecuting fury of Jezebel, and, at considerable personal cost, when everything was at famine prices, fed them with bread and water, when bread and water were luxuries very difficult to procure. Religion does very little for a man if it does not inspire him to generous activity. Noble thoughts look better when crystallized into noble deeds. 2. *Obadiah's piety was main-*

tained in the midst of moral corruption and danger (verses 9-14). It is creditable to Ahab that he had an officer like Obadiah, and though he had steadily refused to bow the knee to Baal, and though it was publicly known that he had befriended the prophets, Ahab must have been so attached to him that even Jezebel had not ventured to bring about his dismissal from the court. And yet Obadiah could not fully trust the king; he was compelled to confess that he might be unrighteously put to death by him (verse 14). Obadiah was not located in a remote and lonely place, but in the midst of a busy court, where he saw and heard nothing good, surrounded by Godless men, and exposed to every temptation to Godlessness, frivolity, rioting, and licentiousness. "To be pious with the pious, to maintain one's faith in the midst of the faithful, is not difficult; but in the midst of the world, to preserve one's self unspotted from it, to keep a pure heart, and have God before our eyes and in our hearts, wherever the Lord places us, this is, indeed, greatly to fear the Lord." 3. *Obadiah's piety was put to a severe test* (verses 7-16). The faith that had sustained the soul amid the corruptions of idolatry was staggered by the simple request of a man of God. That Elijah, journeying on his weary way, should meet the very man who was the only true friend of the prophet at the court, was no more accidental than that Obadiah, going forth in search of provender for the cattle, should find the man who was to test severely his faith and his fear of God. Even those who fear the Lord, and walk by faith, are sometimes, in the hour of peril, overcome by an agony of fear, which bows them down as reeds before a whirlwind Peter, who first threatened with the sword, became suddenly terror-stricken before a damsel. It is good for us to recognize our human weakness, for this knowledge preserves us from over-security, and leads us to pray: Lord, strengthen our faith.

III. He was callously indifferent to the sufferings of his people (verses 5, 6). He was more concerned about his horses and mules than the condition of his subjects. How totally unfit was such a mean-spirited man to wear a crown! It is the fatal result of idolatry to steel the heart against human sympathy. It is a melancholy sight to see in Ahab one who can submit to great personal inconvenience to search for "grass," but who has no desire to enquire after a justly-offended God; while in his whole conduct in this transaction we have the type of all grovelling, sordid souls, who will spend more upon their kennels in a month than upon their cottagers in a year, and who will lose in a few seconds, amid the gambling of the turf, what would endow many an orphanage, and establish a hundred schools.

IV. He was mistaken as to the true cause of national suffering (verse 17). "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" All men who deal faithfully with careless souls are denounced as troublers. There are hundreds who, like Ahab, think of the trouble, but ignore the sin that causes the trouble. Ahab attributed the national distress to the man who had plainly announced to him its cause, and the method by which cause and effect could be removed. In his mad delusion he sought in every country (verse 10) for the life of the heroic prophet. He was swallowed up in revenge when he ought to have been swallowed up in penitence. Idolatry was continued with all its shameless enormities, and its punishment was continued too.

V. He was cowed by the fearless indictment of the faithful prophet (verse 18). The meeting of Ahab and Elijah in the valley of Jezreel was of a very remarkable character; it was one of those scenes which become historic. The savage, hot-tempered accusation of Ahab is met by the calm, stern reply of Elijah: "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house." The monarch quails before the man in sheepskin, and at once becomes pliant in

his hand. A consciousness of right fills the heart with courage. Truth never fears the light; torch like, "the more it's shook it shines," and every falsehood is exposed by its searching glare.

LESSONS:—1. *It is an awful responsibility to be a king.* 2. *The worst kings have often the most exemplary servants.* 3. *Idolatry is an unmitigated curse to king and people.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-18. **Elijah's re-appearance.** In this incident we have three eminent men brought before us, and the conduct of each suggests some useful lessons. I. *With regard to Elijah we have*—1. an illustration of self-denial. It would be no easy matter for Elijah to leave Sarepta. He was surrounded with many inducements to remain—peace, security, plenty, comfort, ease, enjoyment. On the other hand, the duty to which he was called was by no means a pleasant one. The prospect of meeting Ahab would awaken any but agreeable feelings in his heart. He had no reason to expect anything from such a wicked king but harshness and severity. But in the face of these circumstances he is ready to obey the voice of God. That voice is supreme, and he follows it, whatever self-denial it may involve on the one hand, or risk on the other. 2. An illustration of courage. The righteous are as bold as a lion. Elijah showed such boldness on this occasion. He was the messenger of God, doing His bidding, and he could rely upon his God for safety and help; therefore he had no fear at the prospect of meeting Ahab. And when he did meet him, he boldly charged the calamity of the country upon his wickedness and idolatry. We need not only self-denial to withdraw ourselves from the pleasant associations of life, but also courage and determination to do Christ's work in the face of difficulty and danger. II. *With regard to Ahab, we see the hardening and blinding influence of sin.* While the famine pressed sorely upon all the land, the king was most anxious about himself and his royal stud. We read of no effort to alleviate the sufferings of the people: no famine subscriptions; no relief fund for the poor. This is the fruit of sin and heathenism. What a contrast to the teaching of Christ and the conduct of Christian nations, especially our own nation! Let distress come upon any portion of our people, and at once efforts are put forth to relieve them. And Ahab was not only hard and selfish, but he was blind to the true cause of the famine. He attributed it to Elijah. He did not see it was his own sin against God This is one of the fruits of sin; it is blindfolding. It throws a veil over the mind of men, so that they do not see themselves as sinning against God. Hence the need of the Spirit of God to convince of sin. III. *With regard to Obadiah we have*—1. An illustration of fidelity. Obadiah's position would expose him to many temptations, but in the midst of all he was enabled to be faithful to his master and true to his God. He could relieve and help the people of God amid distress and persecution, and at the same time discharge his duty to the king. Similar illustrations of fidelity we have in the case of Joseph in Egypt, and of Daniel in Babylon. 2. An illustration of the advantage of early piety. Obadiah feared God from his youth. This is the secret of his excellent character. Youth is the time to form those habits which fit men for positions of usefulness and importance. When youth has been neglected, one's after years are of much less value in the world and in the church.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

Verses 1, 2. **The commands of God.** I. *Are made known at the right time.* "And it came to pass after many days." II. *Are authori-*

tative and peremptory. "Go, show thyself unto Ahab." III. *Have ever a promise of blessing linked on to them.* "And I will send rain upon the earth." IV. *Are promptly obeyed by His believing servants.* "And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab."

Verse 2. **Famine.** 1. Imposes indescribable sufferings. 2. May be used as a scourge to punish a sinful and idolatrous people. 3. Presents ample materials to the conscientious ruler for repentance and reform.

— Daily bread was scarce, for the land was dried up and unfruitful; but the bread of life, the Word of God, was likewise scarce, for the nation itself was dried up, and those who would have sown the seed of the Word were persecuted and compelled to silence and concealment. Woe to that country upon whom famine, bodily and spiritual, both fall, and who yet are driven by neither to repentance and conversion.

Verses 3, 4. **Eminent piety.** I. Is found in the highest social rank, and in the most unlikely places. II. Consists in "fearing the Lord greatly." III. Is intensely practical in its aims. IV. Has a lofty regard and generous care for the suffering "prophets of the Lord."

Verse 4. Obadiah could not do this without great risk and the exposure of his own person to great danger; neither in that extreme famine could he maintain those hundred prophets without great expenditure of his own substance. Obadiah not only preserved the lives of a hundred innocent men, he saved a hundred worshippers of Jehovah, and yet more, a hundred men who, immediately the persecution was over, and the Baal-worship in Israel destroyed, became useful to the ignorant and bewildered people as their instructors in doctrine. Thus, although Obadiah, as the lieutenant of the royal watch, could not do much for the kingdom of God by direct testimony and instruction, yet indirectly he did a great deal by preserving these witnesses for the truth at the peril of his own life and at the expense of his own fortune. Thus many people, by the maintenance of the witnesses for evangelical truth, by the spread and promotion of the Christian Scriptures, do much for the kingdom of God, which otherwise they could not do, and lay up a reward in heaven, if they do not shun disgrace, nor prefer earthly and perishable gains to the celestial and imperishable.—*Menken.*

— O degenerate state of Israel! anything was now lawful there, saving piety. It is well if God's prophets can find a hole to hide their heads in. They must needs be hard driven when fifty of them are fain to crowd together into one cave: there they had both shade and repast. Good Obadiah hazards his own life to preserve theirs, and spends himself in that extreme dearth, upon their necessary diet. Bread and water was more now, than other whiles wine and delicates. Whether should we wonder more at the mercy of God in reserving a hundred prophets, or in thus sustaining them, being reserved? When did God ever leave His Israel unfurnished of some prophets? When did He leave His prophets unprovided of some Obadiah? How worthy art thou, O Lord, to be trusted with thine own charge! While there are men upon earth, or birds in the air, or angels in heaven, thy messengers cannot want provision.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 5, 6. **A heartless monarch.** 1. A monstrosity in a time of famine. 2. Is more concerned about his stables than the lives of his famishing subjects. 3. Prepares for himself inevitable punishment.

— Pitiful man! Anxious care for the life of his horses and the maintenance of his stables—this is all that the three years and a half of chastisement of the Almighty had called forth in his soul. How often does one think of a person, "Now he will be quite a different person"; and then, behold! where one hopes to find at length thoughts of God and eternity, there are only thoughts of horses and mules;

and in place of holy emotions, instead of aspirations, prayers, and reflections upon the great and eternal interests of life, you find a thick swarm of pitiful cares and considerations which hover about the soul, and hover with it into an awful eternity. Ahab and Obadiah both journey on together through the land, but each goes his own way alone—a picture of their life journey. Ahab walks in the broad, Obadiah in the narrow, way: the latter alone leads to the green pastures and still waters which refresh the soul.—*Krummacher.*

Verse 5. The terribleness of unimproved warnings. What a mournful picture have we here! For three years God had tried this monarch with sore judgments. He had shut up heaven, closed the fountains of the land, decimated his people with famine. The voice seemed too loud, too solemn and awful to be disregarded. We might have expected to see Ahab, like the heathen king of Nineveh, put sackcloth on his loins and dust on his head, calling his people to humiliation and repentance. But alas! the Divine monition seems utterly disregarded. God has emptied His quiver upon him; but arrow after arrow has bounded back from that heart of adamant. He has neither tear for his own guilt, nor tear for his suffering subjects. So far as we are told, the one miserable, petty thought that fills that narrow soul is, to get provender for his stables, and save his mules and horses. Ah! terrible indeed it is when judgments thus lead to an open defiance and resistance of the Divine will; a mocking of his hand, a laughing to scorn of His righteous reproofs; no penitence, no remorse; but rather a more intense selfishness. An unsanctified trial becomes a curse. It indurates if it does not soften. It is like the heat of the sun, which melts the wax, but hardens the clay.—*Macduff.*

Verse 6. Ahab had found Obadiah faithful, and therefore trusted him in this weighty business, rather than any other. Of a man that truly feareth God it may better be said than of Cato, that he never did well that he might appear to do so, but because he could not do otherwise.—*Trapp.*

Verses 8-14. Obadiah finds this load too heavy; neither is he more stricken with the boldness than with the unkindness of this command—boldness in respect of Elijah, unkindness in respect of himself; for thus he thinks—"If Elijah do come to Ahab, he dies; if he do not come, I die. If it be known that I met him and brought him not, it is death. If I say that he will come voluntarily, and God shall alter his intentions, it is death. How unhappy a man am I that must be either Elijah's executioner or my own! Were Ahab's displeasure but smoking, I might hope to quench it; but now that the flame of it hath broken forth to the notice, to the search, of all the kingdoms and nations round about, it may consume me; I cannot extinguish it. This message is for an enemy of Elijah, for a client of Baal. As for me, I have well approved my devotion to God, my love to His prophets. What have I done that I should be singled out either to kill Elijah, or to be killed for him?" Many a hard plunge must that man needs be driven to who would hold his conscience together with the service and favour of a tyrant. It is a happy thing to serve a just master; there is no danger, no stain, in such obedience.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 15, 16. A consciousness of right. I. Nerves the soul with invincible bravery. II. Brings the soul in contact with the most colossal embodiments of iniquity. III. Prompts the soul to the most faithful denunciations of wrong.

— A strong, resolute word of faith exercises power over the heart. It strengthens the weak, supports the tottering, encourages the fearful, and tranquillizes the anxious-minded. A teacher must not shrink from his office through fear or cowardice, let tyrants look grim as they may (1 Peter iii. 14).—*Lange.*

Verse 15. The fear of God putteth

out the fear of any mortal wight, as the sunbeams do the fire on the hearth. When Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, said to Dr. Taylor, the martyr—"Art thou come, thou villain? How darest thou look me in the face for shame? Knowest thou not who I am?" "Yes," quoth Taylor, "I know who you are; you are Dr. Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester and Lord Chancellor, yet but a mortal man, I trow. But if I should be afraid of your lordly looks, why fear you not God, the Lord of us all? How dare you for shame look any Christian man in the face, seeing you have forsaken the truth, denied our Saviour Christ and His Word, and done contrary to your own word and writing?" Thus spake that valiant martyr, like another Elias.—*Trapp.*

Verses 17, 18. The source of national trouble. 1. Is not in the messenger who announces its presence. 2. But in the infidelity and wickedness of the throne. 3. In the national desertion of God. 4. In the adoption and practice of idolatry.

— A remarkable meeting. 1. A numerously attended monarch, and a lonely prophet. 2. The impersonation of great moral weakness in the presence of great moral strength. 3. An angry question met by a calm, overwhelming reply. 4. The authority of the prophet triumphing for the time over that of the king.

— At last the mysterious prophet, whom each had desired to see for so long, appeared suddenly before them. "Behold Elijah!" was the message which the faithful Obadiah was to take back to Ahab—two awful words which he thrice repeats, before he can be induced to return. "Art thou my lord Elijah?" was the reverential salute of the minister. "Art thou the troubler of Israel?" was the angry question of the king. But it was an anger which soon sunk into awe. Face to face at last they met, the prophet and the king. In that hour of extreme despair, the voice of Elijah sounded with an authority which it had never had before. The drought, we are told, had been threatened by him. It was then, doubtless, as it still is, the belief of Eastern countries that seers and saints have the power of withholding or giving rain. In the convent of Mount Sinai the Arabs believe that there is a book, by the opening or shutting of which the monks can disperse or retain the rain of the peninsula.—*Stanley.*

Verse 17. Doubtless Ahab, startled to hear of Elijah coming to meet him as one that did not more hate than fear the prophet. Well might he think, "Thus long, thus far, have I sought Elijah; Elijah would not come to seek me but under a sure guard, and with some strange commission. His coarse mantle hath the advantage of my robe and sceptre. If I can command a piece of the earth, I see he can command heaven." The edge of his revenge is taken off with a doubtful expectation of the issue; and now, when Elijah offers himself to the eyes of Ahab, he who durst not strike, yet durst challenge, the prophet—"Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Jeroboam's hand was still in Ahab's thoughts; he holds it not so safe to smite as to expostulate. He that was the head of Israel speaks out that which was in the heart of all his people, that Elijah was the cause of all their sorrow. Alas! what hath the righteous prophet done? He taxed their sin; he foretold the judgment, he deserved it not, he inflicted it not; yet he smarts, and they are guilty; as if some fond people should accuse the herald or the trumpet as the cause of their war; or, as if some ignorant peasant, when he sees his fowls bathing in his pond, should cry out of them as the causes of foul weather.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 18. This stern rebuke led the poor king to feel that he had his master before him, and that the hairy mantle of the prophet was a symbol of greater power than the royal robe, and his staff an emblem of higher authority than his own sceptre. He quailed before the fearless prophet;

and the same facility of temper which inclined him to evil when under the influence of Jezebel, swayed him to good in the presence of Elijah. We have heard of men whose whisper could quell the rage of the wildest horse, and bend him down to sudden tameness. Power of the like kind some men possess over other men. Elijah possessed it eminently; it was the gift of God, and such a man as Ahab was a proper subject for its influence. Besides, Ahab seems to have had some capacities for right feeling when away from under the deadly influence of his wife; and whatever may have been his first purpose when he heard that Elijah awaited him, he had time to cool on the way to the place where he was.—*Kitt*.

— O, the heroic spirit of Elijah! He stands alone amid all the train of Ahab, and dares not only repel this charge, but retorts it. "I have not troubled Israel, but thou." No earthly joy can daunt him who hath the clear and heartening visions of God. This holy seer discerns the true cause of our sufferings to be our sins. Foolish men are plagued for their offences, and it is no small part of their plague that they see it not. The only common disturber of men, families, cities, kingdoms, worlds, is sin. There is no such traitor to any state as the wilfully wicked; the quietest and most plausible offender is secretly seditious, and stirreth quarrels in heaven.—*Bp Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 19-40.

The Trial and Defeat of Idolatry.

The grand, imposing spectacle on Mount Carmel described in these verses has an interest and a lesson to humanity for all time. As in other ages and countries, a great delusion was here tested, exposed, and overthrown. Truth long despised and persecuted had the opportunity of vindicating itself, and the vindication was so public and complete as to constitute an example for universal reference. The place was worthy of the scene to be enacted there. Carmel was the peculiar haunt of Elijah. Situated on the west of Palestine, immediately to the south of the Bay of Acre, it rises at its highest point sixteen hundred feet above the level of the Mediterranean Sea, from the shores of which it stretches in a south-eastern course, and in ranges of different heights, for five or six miles, commanding a view of the great plain of Esdraelon, just where the glades of the forest sink into the usual bareness of the hills of Manasseh. In the distance, and on its commanding position, overlooking the whole valley, rose the stately city of Jezreel, with Ahab's palace and Jezebel's temple embosomed in its sacred grove. Immediately under their feet spread, far and wide, that noble plain—the battle-field of sacred history—the plain of Megiddo or Jezreel, with the torrent Kishon passing (as its name implies) in countless windings through the level valley—that ancient stream on whose banks had perished the host of Sisera and the host of Midian, before the army of Deborah and Barak, before the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. In such a scene, with such recollections of the past, were the people of Israel gathered for a conflict as momentous as any which had taken place in the plain beneath. On the one side were ranged the king and people, with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal dressed in their splendid vestments; and on the other side the one solitary figure of the prophet of the Lord in his rough sheepskin cloak, though supported all the time by an invisible throng of heavenly intelligences. Observe—

I. That idolatry was here put on its trial under the most favourable circumstances to secure its triumph. 1. *Took place at the seat of its greatest power.* Idolatry was the established religion of Israel, and those who did not heartily accept it were awed into submission by the terrors of persecution.

The multitude now gathered on Carmel, from the king downward, were worshippers of Baal, and were ready to defend their favourite deity. It seemed a daring and hopeless thing to offer the slightest opposition. 2. *Was accepted by its acknowledged leaders.* The four hundred and fifty priests might have declined the contest, and the king might have forbade it; but whether compelled by the unanimous voice of the people, or assured of victory by observing the lonely and unfriended condition of Elijah, or urged by an influence they were powerless to resist, they accepted the challenge. Could it be that they had any real confidence in the power of Baal? Alas! there is no knowing to what depth of delusion idolatry may sink its victims. The maddening earnestness of the reiterated appeals to Baal (verses 26, 28) was a sight to make one sad. 3. *Appealed to what the worshippers believed was the most prominent attribute of their deity* (verse 24). Baal was the sun-god, and his worshippers might readily suppose that, having at his command the source of light and fire, he would in such a strife vindicate himself by answering by fire. Surely, Elijah might have urged, your sun-god should find it easy, in the use of his own element, to triumph over Jehovah! He takes the Baalites on their own ground, and agrees that by a sign from heaven in the form of fire the claims of their respective religions shall be determined. The proposition is startling, because it was of the very essence of Judaism that there was no other God but Jehovah. It was a great concession on the part of Elijah to heathen notions, where contests as to the power of rival deities were of frequent occurrence. Thus Baal had everything in his favour, and if he could do anything at all, now was his opportunity.

II. That idolatry exhausted all its resources in the contest (verses 26-29). Confident of success, the priests of Baal dress the bullock, and place the cut pieces dripping on the altar. The condition was they should put no fire under; although St. Chrysostom has preserved an old tradition which asserts that inside their altar the Baalites had secreted an accomplice who was to kindle a fire, but that in the act of so doing he died of suffocation. And now for three long hours the cry is heard—the anxiety of king, and priests, and people, growing more intense and feverish with each repetition—"O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice, nor any that answered. To hurry the answer, they begin the wild, frantic pagan dance. "As the Mussulman dervishes work themselves into a frenzy by the invocation of *Allah! Allah!* until the words themselves are lost in inarticulate gasps; as the pilgrims round the church of St. John at Samaria formerly, and round the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre now, race, run, and tumble, in order to bring down the Divine fire into the midst of them; so the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal performed their wild dances round their altar, or upon it, springing up or sinking down with the fantastic gestures which Orientals alone can command, as if by an internal mechanism, and screaming with that sustained energy which believes it will be heard for its much speaking." Still no answer. This afforded an opportunity Elijah could not resist, and he mocked the devotees with words of bitter irony (verse 27). His object was to stimulate the priests to greater exertions, and so to make their failure more complete, and to suggest to the people that such failure would prove absolutely that Baal was no God. Elijah's scorn has the effect intended; it rouses the Baalites to increased effort. Louder and louder grow their cries, wilder and more rapid their dance, more frantic their gesticulations. At length, when the frenzy has reached its height, knives are drawn from their sheaths, lances are upraised, and the blood spurts forth from hundreds of self-inflicted wounds. And this was all idolatry could do: Baal was unresponsive to the most piteous cries, was powerless to help, and his worshippers are driven to suicide and despair! Could anything more completely expose the utter helplessness and vanity of idolatry?

III. That idolatry suffered a signal and crushing defeat (verses 30-38). 1. *Was defeated by the Being it ignored and insulted.* Elijah was careful in all his arrangements to give prominence to Jehovah, of whom he was but the humble and intermediate agent. The altar was built in the name of Jehovah (verse 32); the offering was arranged according to the injunctions of the law of Jehovah (verse 33 compared with Levit. i. 3-9); and the short, simple, and beautifully suggestive prayer was designedly addressed to "the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of *Israel*" (verses 36, 37). Jehovah had been forgotten; His ever-living presence is again asserted: He had been ignored and insulted; His peerless majesty and righteous claims are again vindicated. 2. *The defeat was signal and complete* (verse 38). As the sky was still perfectly clear, this fire cannot have been a flash of lightning. It was altogether, in its nature as well as in its opportuneness, miraculous. From the clear blue ether overhead, deepening as the sun declined towards the sea, the whole multitude saw the bright white flame descend, and in a moment consume everything—the fragments of the ox on the summit of the altar, the pile of wood heaped from the forest of Carmel, the very stones of the altar, the dust, and also the water that filled the trench, till everything is consumed, and the crackle and hiss are gone. "The prayer of a moment has accomplished what the howlings of a whole day have failed to achieve." The most obdurate heart could not fail to be convinced. The neglected and insulted God of Israel has triumphed, as He ever must. 3. *The defeat was publicly acknowledged* (verse 39). Unable to endure the brilliance of the Divine light, the people fell on their faces before it, and hid their eyes lest they should be blinded (Lev. ix. 24; 2 Chron. vii. 3). The people understand thoroughly the nature and bearing of the whole scene, as a trial to determine whether Baal or Jehovah is the true God. And they now pronounce the matter to be clearly and certainly decided Baal is overthrown; he is proved to be no god at all. The Lord Jehovah, He and He alone, is God. Him will they henceforth acknowledge, and no other. The time is coming when truth shall universally triumph, and the supremacy and glory of God be everywhere adored (Phil. ii. 10, 11).

IV. That idolatry involves its votaries in disgrace and punishment (verse 40). The vindicator of Jehovah becomes His avenger. The slaughter of the idolatrous priests was in harmony with the express commands of the law (Deut. xiii. 5; xvii. 2-5; xviii. 20). Moreover, a prophet under the theocracy had a right to step in and execute the law when the king failed in his duty. In this act we may see some retaliation for Jezebel's slaughter of the prophets of the Lord. It is an unalterable principle of the Divine government that evil-doers shall be punished for their sins, and often by the same instruments with which they have wrought the evil. Robespierre perished on the same scaffold on which he had shed some of the best and bravest blood of France.

LESSONS:—1. *Error is sure to fail when fairly put to the test.* 2. *The claims of God to universal homage are absolute and unchangeable.* 3. *The enemies of God will meet with their merited punishment.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 19-40. The challenge. Whenever we read of a meeting of crowned heads or prominent statesmen, we generally infer that they have been called together by some pressing object in which they are mutually interested—an object which may involve the welfare of a people, or the destiny of a nation. And when Elijah and Ahab met face to face, such an object as this engaged their thought and discussion. The people of Israel

had for a long time been suffering from a severe famine, and the king attributes it to Elijah, who disclaims the responsibility, and charges it upon the conduct of the king. Not only does he makes this charge, but he is anxious to put it to a fair trial, and consequently he gives Ahab the challenge contained in the above verses. Concerning the challenge, we shall notice the object, the test, the decision, the result.

I. The object. 1. To confirm his statement that Ahab was responsible for the prevailing distress. This could only be obtained on the assumption that Jehovah would support Elijah in his denunciation of the king by some manifestation of Himself which would carry conviction to the mind of Ahab and others; and by this challenge Elijah sought such a manifestation of God. 2. To establish his claim as the prophet of God. In all probability the people would regard Elijah with the same unbelief and hostility as Ahab did. And before Elijah could gain a hearing from them, he needed to overcome their unbelief and opposition. This could be done by means of the challenge. 3. To prove that Jehovah was the only true God, and that Baalim was no god. This was the most important object of the challenge. At this time the people believed Jehovah to be one among many gods. Elijah sought to show them that besides Him there was no god; that Baalim and all other supposed gods were the creations of men's minds, and, therefore, false. 4. To restore the people of Israel to their allegiance to Jehovah. They had forsaken Him, and transferred their allegiance to Baalim. Elijah seeks to recover them from this apostacy; and the means by which he sought it was admirably adapted to his purpose. If God should answer Elijah, then the people would be reminded in a forcible manner of their own past history, the most prominent and grandest feature of which was the appearance of Jehovah at various times to their fathers; to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; to Moses in the burning bush; in Egypt; at the Red Sea; throughout the wilderness; to Joshua at the Jordan; at Jericho; and in giving them possession of the land wherein they dwelt. A similar manifestation to themselves would surely impress them with a sense of their sin, and awaken repentance in their hearts.

II. The test. 1. This test was fair to the Baalites. They acknowledged Baal as the god of fire. If he could manifest his power in any way, surely he could in the way proposed. 2. It was honourable to Elijah. His appeal was to the special prerogative of Baal. He does not ask for a manifestation of power not claimed for him by his followers. 3. It was adapted to the multitude. It was one upon which they could all judge. It would appeal to their senses, involving no mystery, and leaving no room for doubt.

III. The decision. Elijah's proposal being accepted, he suggested to the Baalites that they should be the first to make the trial to which they agreed. No sooner had they retired, than Elijah steps forward to prepare the altar for his bullock. His preparation is more elaborate. He has a trench dug round it, and water poured upon the sacrifice and the wood; this is repeated three times. Here we see his wisdom and his faith. He is protecting himself against any charge of procuring fire by false means. He can afford to do this, because he believes that God can send sufficient fire to consume the sacrifice, notwithstanding the water. With what excited feeling would the multitude watch Elijah, as he came near and asked the God of Abraham to show Himself this day that He was God in Israel, so that His apostate people might be convinced of their sins and return unto Him. At the close of his prayer, the fire fell and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. It required no deliberation to form a judgment upon the point at issue

When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and said: "The Lord He is the God, the Lord He is the God!"

IV. The result. The prophets of Baal were slain. There are some objections raised against the conduct of Elijah in such a slaughter. Could he slay these prophets in the face of the authority of the king? Would the people obey Elijah in this thing? How is it to be reconciled with justice? To these objections we may answer: 1. Ahab was a coward; he would be overwhelmed with fear, and would shrink from opposing his authority to one who could in such a way invoke the God of Heaven. 2. The people knew that God had spoken against idolatry, and His law was that those who practised it were to be put to death. 3. God sought to establish His claim to be King of kings and Lord of lords: that He was a jealous God, and would not share His glory with another. The people needed to be taught this, and by such terrible means they would learn the lesson. Let us learn: 1. That God's claims are submitted to our intelligence and judgment, as well as to our hearts. 2. It is our duty to examine His claims and to yield to them. 3. It is unreasonable and dangerous to be undecided with regard to them.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

—A memorable day. 1. Because of the unique assemblage it gathered. 2. Because of the distinguished personages it engaged. 3. Because of the extraordinary nature of its transactions. 4. Because of the momentous truths involved. 5. Because of the important results that followed.

Verse 19-38. Elijah on Mount Carmel, surrounded by all Israel, while the prophets of the groves, and those that ate at Jezebel's table, were offering their bullocks, or crying "O Baal, hear us!" and leaping upon the altars, and cutting themselves with knives, is a picture with which we are all familiar. If you try to recall the impressions which it has made upon you, I think you will feel that it has not proceeded mainly from the sudden appearance of the fire which came forth to consume Elijah's sacrifice, but from the contrast between the fever and restlessness of the priests, and the calmness and minute regularity of all the proceedings of the prophet. To testify by the form of the altar that the people were even then a portion of the twelve tribes, that they were united in God's sight, though visibly separated by the sins of men, was one great part of Elijah's work. But it was not a less important part of his duty to remind the people that God had appointed the method and time of the sacrifice; that prayer to Him was not a violent effort to bring about some mighty result desired by the worshipper, but was an act of quiet obedience, of self-surrender: all its earnestness being derived from a belief in the willingness of God to make His creature that which without Him he cannot be. "O Lord God, turn the heart of this people back again! they are in an unnatural, disorderly condition; they are trying to be independent of Thee. And they have so fixed and rooted themselves in that which is false, that they cannot break loose from it. The evil power to which they have done homage holds them fast bound in his fetters. Good has become evil to them; evil has become good. Ruler of the heart and reins, who desirest good and nothing but good for them, make them reasonable beings, restore them to the state of men!" To this prayer the fire was an answer. It came down as a witness that God himself is the Author as well as the Accepter of every sacrifice; that all fire must be false which He has not kindled.—*Maurice.*

Verse 21. The necessity of decision in religion. 1. Because of its superior claims. 2. Because of its exalting benefits. 3. Because of the moral deterioration and inevitable misery involved in prolonged hesitation.

— 1. Israel's double-mindedness. 2. Israel's unreasonableness. 3. Israel's coldness and indifference under appeal.

— "And the people answered him

not a word." **The sullenness of unbelief.** 1. Unbelief is slow to accept evidence. 2. Is reluctant to admit conviction. 3. Stubbornly refuses to act in harmony with both evidence and conviction.

— Israel is met together. Elijah rates them not so much for their superstition, as for their unsettledness and irresolution. Nothing is more odious to God than a profane neutrality in main oppositions of religion. To go upright in a wrong way is a less eyesore to God than to halt betwixt right and wrong. The Spirit wished that the Laodiceans were either hot or cold; either temper would be better borne than neither, than both. In reconcileable differences, nothing is more safe than indifferency both of practice and opinion; but in cases of so necessary hostility as betwixt God and Baal, he that is on neither side is the deadliest enemy to both. Less hateful are they to God that serve Him not at all, than they that serve Him with a rival.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 22. The solitariness of the good. 1. A picture of indomitable bravery when menaced by overwhelming numbers. 2. Calls forth profound sorrow in view of the popular and prevailing iniquity. 3. Yearns for companions to share the bliss of a holy life.

Verse 24. We see the god of the blind, mad world; and the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. The generation of to-day thinks itself elevated far above the Baal worship, which in its nature was deification of nature and the world; and yet how often does it happen that it serves the creature rather than the Creator! Men no longer make gods out of wood and stone, but construct them out of their own thoughts, and worship their own ideas. The world wishes to hear nothing of the God who is holy and ready to sanctify the sinful heart of man; who is just, and metes to each man the measure which he deserves; who does not suffer Himself to be scorned; of the rebukes and chastisements of such a God as He has revealed Himself in His Word, the world makes nothing; and will only hear of a God who never rebukes or punishes, who is no avenging judge, who works no miracles, can hear no prayers. Elijah, could he return to earth, would scorn such a divinity no less than he did the idol Baal.—*Lange.*

— The people now find a voice. They had hesitated before, not wishing to decide between the two worships, or wholly to relinquish either. They now readily accept a proposition which promises them an exciting spectacle, and will relieve them of the trouble of making a decision by mental efforts of their own.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verses 26-29. The infatuation of idolatry. 1. May beguile minds of the highest order. 2. Incites its votaries to the most extravagant acts. 3. Is more resolute the less it succeeds. 4. Presents a painful picture of what self-deceived humanity may become.

Verses 36-39. The sublimity and efficacy of true prayer. 1. If we consider the glorious Being to whom it is addressed (verse 36). 2. If we contrast it with the wild iterations of raving idolaters (verses 26-28). If we consider the practical good it seeks to confer on men (verse 37). 3. If we consider the remarkable answers vouchsafed (verses 38, 39).

Verse 37. All knowledge and recognition of God is inseparable from the conversion of the heart to Him. That is the aim of every testimony and revelation of God, and for that every true servant of God should daily pray in behalf of those entrusted to his care. Elijah, unlike the priests of Baal, who called upon their god the whole day, used few words, yet was he heard, because in those few words he expressed infinite meaning, and his prayer came from the depths of a believing, unquestioning soul.

Verse 38. What is the miracle of that fire which devoured the burnt offering and compelled the whole people to cry out: "The Lord He is God," in comparison with the miracle that God hath sent His Son into the world to kindle the greatest fire which has ever burnt in the world; compared with the miracle that the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory? In Bethlehem, and upon Golgotha, the glory of the Lord is infinitely higher in its manifestation than upon Carmel.—*Lange.*

Verse 40. The appeal of Elijah was to the people. He called upon them to inflict then and there, upon these ringleaders of the people in idolatry, the punishment which the law denounced, and such as would have been inflicted upon himself had the victory been on their side; and the king seems to have been too awe-stricken to interfere. From the character of Elijah, we have no doubt that he executed this act of blood heartily and with entire satisfaction. It is not for us to vindicate him; the only question is: Was this in accordance with the law and with the spirit of the times? It certainly was; and Britons, not so much as fifty years ago, performed under their own laws, with perfect peace of mind, upon far less heinous offenders, the deadly executions which we now regard with horror. If, then, in looking back upon the last generation, we make allowance for this great change of law and sentiment within so short a time, we must needs make the same allowance in surveying the more remote and less refined age in which Elijah lived.—*Kitto.*

— A fearful vengeance, surely! Does the thought occur to you—"If this book be, as is alleged, not a mere history of that which is strange and exceptional, but a revelation of permanent laws and principles, may not this act be pleaded in justification of any, even the most outrageous punishment of worshippers false, or thought to be false, that has ever taken place in any age of the Christian church?" I answer, I conceive this story as a revelation of permanent principles, just as I believe Elijah's declaration that there should be no rain nor dew, or his commanding the widow's cruse not to fail, is the revelation of a permanent principle. The one shows forth God's indignation against those who corrupt and demoralize a nation by trading in religious arts and fears, just as the others show God's continual government over the outward universe, and His protecting care over every person who dwells in it. The method in which the revelation of these truths was made belongs to a peculiar period of the world's history. In a general way, it may be said to belong to the whole Jewish dispensation, including in that the period down to the destruction of Jerusalem. In another sense, it belonged to the special circumstances of the time in which Elijah was living. We do not need to have prophets executing these purposes of the Divine government, which famines, pestilences, revolutions execute without them, or those which are accomplished through the intervention of the ordinary minister of health and nourishment. But if no prophet had ever been commissioned to do one kind of work as well as the other, we should not have known to whom we might refer them. An infinite darkness would have rested both upon human and natural proceedings, which, except through our own fault and unwillingness to profit by God's illumination, does not rest upon them now.—*Maurice.*

— The sentence upon the idol-priests was a terrible but necessary one, which should serve us not as an example, but as a warning; for although under the new covenant superstition and unbelief, idol-worship and apostacy, are not chastised with fire and sword, yet there is not wanting a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. Those who tread under foot the blood of the Lamb will shrink from the wrath of the Lamb (Luke ix. 54-56; Heb. x. 27-31; Rev. vi. 16).—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 41—46.

Suggestive Phases of the Praying Spirit.

I. It is quick to perceive the indications of coming blessing (verse 41). "There is a sound of abundance of rain." To the keen, sensitive ears of the prophet, the splash of the long-wished for rain was already falling on the parched soil, and roaring along the hitherto empty torrent beds. He heard in reality, or by anticipation, the gentle wind sighing through the forest of Carmel, and waving the tree tops which have been poetically spoken of as so many bells summoning this lone worshipper to prayer: and in the East the wind is the precursor of the approaching shower. A certain Polish Jew, whose great musical genius raised him to eminence and wealth, had become so familiar with the different kinds of wood of which he made his flutes and reeds when in the capacity of a poor shepherd, that he knew every tree of the forest by the peculiarity of its sound. So, long practice in prayer sharpens every sensibility of the soul, and familiarizes it with the faintest indications, unheard by other ears, of the nearness and character of advancing benedictions.

II. It seeks retirement (verse 42). "Elijah went up to the top of Carmel." Leaving Ahab to take his meal at the place where the sacrifice had been consumed, the prophet ascended not quite to the highest elevation, as appears from his words to his servant (verse 43), but to a point little below the highest, whence the sea was not visible. He needed to retire only a short distance to the West, and there, on the slope just below the summit, sequestered by bushes and trees, such as are still to be found there, he could pour out his heart to God in secret. Devotion needs times of quietness and solitude in order to store up spiritual strength for the bustle and conflict of life. How often is it said of the great prophet of mankind that "he went up into a mountain apart to pray!" And all who would catch his spirit and tone, in however humble a degree, must seek it in private communion (Matt. vi. 6).

III. It has ever some special subject for personal supplication. Elijah had prayed before that it might *not* rain, and a prolonged period of drought and famine was the answer. But now the great burden of his prayer was *for* the rain that had been so long withheld (James v. 17, 18). 1. *This supplication was intensely earnest.* "He cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees" (verse 42), by this unusual attitude indicating the extraordinary intensity of his prayer. The highest results of prayer can be attained only by fervent, agonising efforts. The greatness of the blessing sought stimulates the urgency of the petitioner. 2. *This supplication was persevering* (verse 43). "Go again seven times." There was spiritual discipline here. Delaying is not denying. The blessing is withheld, partly to certify the fact that it comes from God, to show the necessity of hourly dependence, and to teach that, whatever apparent difficulties there may be in the way, "men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Six times the messenger returned with the disappointing intelligence, "There is nothing"; but the Tishbite's faith was undaunted; he had unswerving confidence in the prayer hearing God. Though he had the definite promise of God that rain should be sent (verse 1), and had caught with prophetic instinct the precursive sign of its coming (verse 41), yet he continued pleading with unabated earnestness. Persevering prayer wins the victory.

IV. It is privileged to witness substantial answers to prayer (verses 44, 45). "A speck at length darkens the distant heavens.

> Comes a vapour from the margin, blackening over heath and holt,
> Cramming all the blast before it, in its breast a thunderbolt.

It is the first that has been seen for three years and a half. It is abundantly visible in a sky which too clear, like a too beautiful cheek, tells there is surely something wrong. It rises higher and higher—it becomes broader and broader—it moves with amazing celerity. The glow of the sunset is lost in gloom. Long raven wings are extended all over the hill. The banks of the Kishon put on a ghastlier hue. It breaks; and there, amid a hoarse thanksgiving murmur from the forest around, rains down the grateful deluge—token that the prayers of the bent prophet have been graciously heard, and that his victory over Baal is now, in fire and water, visibly complete." Few of God's praying people but can refer to some period in their history when their prayers were answered with overwhelming copiousness.

V. It is the best preparation for active and important service (verse 46). Divinely directed and divinely upheld, Elijah, instead of resting after the excitement and fatigues of the day, girded up his loins, and ran in advance of the king's chariot, which was no doubt driven at speed, the entire distance of at least sixteen miles to the entrance of Jezreel. He thus showed himself ready to countenance and uphold the irresolute monarch, if he would turn from his evil courses, and proceed to carry out the religious reformation which the events of the day had inaugurated (*Speaker's Comm.*). The stern and fiery-spirited prophet was, after all, a faithful and obedient subject; though severe in matters of religion, he was constitutional and loyal in matters of state. His aim was, not to injure king or people, but to defend and restore the worship of the God of Israel. Praying and working must never be disjoined. The best work is done by him who prays the best.

LESSONS:—1. *Some characters would have no greatness at all if it were not for their spirit of prayer.* 2. *Prayer should not be less, but more, earnest because of the evident approach of the answer* 3. *Prayer is absolutely essential for efficiency in all Christian work.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses. 41-46. The rain. In this incident Elijah reaches the great crisis of his life. It was to him a time of suspense and anxiety. He would wonder whether God would now hear him by sending rain, as He had recently done by sending fire. If God should answer him this time, then his great work would be accomplished, and he should experience the joy of success. It was for this hour he had been living during the last few years. This was to be the crowning point of his life—that point in which the past and the future meet—when his soul would be filled with anxiety and concern as to the issue. Such were the feelings with which Elijah for the second time ascended Carmel to seek the manifestation of God's presence and power. Notice—

I. The object of his faith. To procure rain for the parched land Let us learn from his example to keep a clearly defined object before our faith. With regard to God—His fatherhood, His mercy and love, His nearness to us and readiness to help: with regard to our life—the conquering of sinful temper or passion, the increase of holiness and devotedness to God: with regard to our work—in the family, in the Sunday school class, in the pulpit. **II. The means by which he sought this object.** The attitude of prayer. He might have been tempted to have left God to fulfil His own promise, but he did not. His faith was operative, and led him to pray earnestly. True faith will always influence us to labour and pray for its object. **III. The encouragement he received.** "A sound of abundance of rain." This was an

indication of God's nearness to him, and a token that his prayer would be answered. This sound, in all likelihood, was heard only by himself. And so is it ever with the man who has strong faith in God, and who lives in close union and intimate fellowship with Him. He has visions of God unseen by others. It is by such tokens that he is sustained and stimulated in the work God has given him to do. **IV. The discouragement he met with.** "There is nothing." He hoped for intelligence of the clouds rising and bearing in their bosoms the plentiful showers; but there was no sign of them. The discouragement came to Elijah from the servant and the circumstances of the case; not from God—from Him he received encouragement and stimulus. Like the prophet, *we* receive discouragement every day from men and from circumstances. From men and things we receive constant disappointment; but from God we receive no disappointment—He never fails. **V. The perseverance he manifested.** "Go again seven times." Many a one would have grown weary on being told by the servant two or three times, "There is nothing." But Elijah was not to be turned aside from his object by having to wait. He continues to watch and pray. While doing so he was the object of conflicting influences, of a discouraging and encouraging character; but by the assistance of the latter he was enabled to overcome the former, and to persevere. Like him we are exposed to the two classes of influences, but we are encouraged to persevere. **VI. The success realized.** "There was a great rain." Though he had to wait, yet God heard him. Who can imagine the feeling of joy that would rush into the prophet's heart as he received the answer to his prayer? His character as a true prophet would be established, and God would be honoured by the steadfastness and perseverance of His servant.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

Verses 41, 42. Wretched man! He was no more touched by the great, heartsearching events of the day, than if he had witnessed an interesting but very long play, after which refreshment is most welcome, and food tastes well. Yet where are not such Ahab-souls to be found? Ah! woe to you who permit the strongest evidences, the most powerful appeals to conscience, and the most touching works of God, to glide before you like a magic-lantern before your eyes: you enjoy it a little, perhaps, but you bring home from the churches and meetings nothing except some complaints over the long divine service, or some matter for lively conversation or self-satisfied criticism, and a good appetite for the meal that now follows, and a gay looking forward to the pleasures and enjoyment which the evening of the Sabbath day will bring you. Who has greater cause than Ahab to seek solitude, fall down upon his knees and say, God be merciful to me, and blot out my sins after Thy great mercy, and make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us (Psa. li. 3; xc. 15). But of all this, not a word. The rain alone was of importance to him, not the Lord and His mercy. How many like-minded ones in our day!—*Krummacher.*

Verse 41. The sensitiveness of faith. 1. Is on the alert for answers to prayer. 2. Is conscious of the nearness of great blessings. 3. Prepares the soul for the reception and use of heavenly visitations. 4. Gives additional urgency to prayer.

— No ears but Elijah's could as yet perceive a sound of rain: the clouds were not yet gathered, the vapours were not yet risen, yet Elijah hears that which shall be. Those that are of God's counsel can discern either favours or judgments afar off. The slack apprehensions of carnal hearts make them hard to believe that as future which the quick and refined senses of the faithful perceive as present.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Glad and grateful must that moment have been to the many thousands of Israel, when the gasping earth that had for three long years

suffered in dumb agony, drank in the refreshing flood of God; when the true church, who had beheld in that sky of brass and these furrows of iron the visible tokens of the Divine curse, now witnessed the heavens unfolding their black, inky scroll, with the joyful tidings that the curse was removed! Can we participate in this joy in a loftier spiritual sense? Do we see the curse of sin taken away; God propitiated; and from the rain with which He is filling the pools, are we drawing all needful supplies for our parched souls? If we are drooping and desponding; if our cry is, "My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is"; we again echo Elijah's words, "Get thee up, for there is the sound of abundance of rain." Our privileges are many. The spirit of God is ever and anon moving "on the tops of the mulberry trees." The small clouds have been rising, and copious showers have fallen. Go, get thee, like Elijah, get thee to the oratory, pray that the cloud may spread, that it may stretch across the heavens!—*Macduff.*

Verses 42, 43. **Elijah praying.** We propose to consider the conduct of Elijah as suggestive of important lessons to the people of God in reference to a subject which claims their utmost solicitude, namely, the descent of spiritual blessing, the coming of a gracious rain upon the church and the world. Mark—I. *The circumstances by which Elijah's prayer is distinguished.* 1. The place to which he resorted. He "went up to the top of Carmel." It was a place of privacy, retirement, seclusion. Hence we read of those who did "hide themselves in the top of Carmel" (Amos ix. 3). It is by secret prayer manifestations of power and blessing are secured, and revivals ushered in. "Come! my people! enter into thy chambers, and shut thy door about thee!" "Enter into thy closet," &c. (Matt. vi. 6). 2. The attitude he assumed. "He cast himself down upon the earth," &c. Indicative of reverence, humility, fervour. Our prayers should be thus distinguished. Think of the majesty of the Being we address; the disparity existing between ourselves and Him; the infinite importance of the blessings sought (Isaiah vi. 3; Gen. xix. 27; Exodus iii. 5). 3. The faith which he exercised. That for which Elijah prayed, God had promised (verse 1). The promise of God is faith's warrant. Prayer is the condition, the promise, the encouragement (Ez. xxx. 37). Elijah believed God; hence he "said to his servant, Go up now, and look toward the sea," whence clouds and vapours usually arise. Oh! how unlike Elijah have we frequently been! How does his conduct proclaim, "Have faith in God." 4. The perseverance he manifested. Six times he sent his servant up the hill, and he sees nothing, brings no good news to his master; yet Elijah continues praying. Like his father Jacob, his conduct says, "I will not let thee go unless Thou bless me." (See xvii. 21; Psalm lxxx. 5-7 xc. 13-16.) Delays are not denials "Though the vision tarry, wait for it." Send your prayers up the hill of Zion, not seven times, but seventy times seven. Though the cloud cannot be seen, the promise can.

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone."

II. *The success with which Elijah's prayer was crowned.* 1. And it came to pass at the seventh time (44, 45). The cloud was small at first; but it was the precursor of "a great rain." 2. Every succeeding age has supplied examples equally remarkable. The disciples in the "upper room"; Cornelius at Cæsarea; Paul and Silas at Philippi; Peter in prison, &c. 3. Other instances besides those which the inspired record supplies—*e.g.*, the Reformation of the sixteenth century; the Wesleys at Oxford; the Revival in America and Ireland in 1857; personal history. You prayed till you could praise—the blessing came, &c. III. *The encouragement which Elijah's servant, and that of past ages, supplies to the church of the present day.* Seen in the unchangeable character of God. "I am the Lord, I change not." What

He was to Elijah on Mount Carmel, He is to us. 2. The unalterable efficacy of prayer. It is still the way of approach, the medium of success, the hand which moves the arm which moves the world. 3. The immutability of God's promises. The great rain which is to precede the world's harvest is the subject of explicit promise (see Isaiah xliv. 3; Joel ii. 29; Psalm lxxii. 6-8; Numbers xiv. 21).—*The Lay Preacher.*

Verse 42. **The worldly and the religious spirit—a contrast.** 1. The worldly spirit finds relief in festivity; the religious spirit in prayer. 2. The worldly spirit is but temporarily affected by the most imposing spectacles of divine power; the religious spirit bows in reverence and humility before God. 3. The worldly spirit is more intent in looking for temporal results; the religious spirit for spiritual reformation.

Verses 43, 44. All that while is the prophet in his prayers, neither is any whit undaunted with that delay. Hope holds up the head of our holy desires, and perseverance crowns it. If we receive not an answer to our suits at the sixth motion, we may not be out of countenance, but must try the seventh. At last a little cloud arises out of the sea—a handbreadth. So many, so fervent prayers cannot but pull water out of heaven as well as fire: those sighs reflect upon the earth, and from the earth reflect upon heaven, from heaven rebound upon the sea, and raise vapours up thence to heaven again. If we find that our prayers are heard for the substance, we may not cavil at the quantity. From how small beginnings have great matters arisen! It is no otherwise in all the gracious proceedings of God with the soul. Scarce sensible are these first works of His spirit in the heart which grow up at last to the wonder of men and applause of angels.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 43. "There is nothing." A common verdict. 1. Of the world concerning the church. 2. Of the church concerning the world. 3. Of the disappointed worshipper concerning idolatry. 4. Of the baffled inquirer concerning infidelity. 5. Of the surfeited votary concerning pleasure.

— Oftentimes we look in vain, and yet see nothing of the comfort of the Lord, nothing of His help and salvation. He leaves us awhile prostrated in dust and misery, does not at once, hearkening and comforting, raise us up, but appears as if the voice of our crying reached Him not. But if we do not lose our confidence in Him, if we redouble our prayers and entreaties, He will not let us be ashamed (Isa. xlix. 23). He will comfort, help, and hearken to us at His own, the best time. A man must not weary of prayer, even though it appears to him useless (Jer. xviii. 1; Col. iv. 2; Eph. vi. 1).—*Menken.*

— "Go again seven times." Here was an act of faith on Elijah's part, and on that of his servant, and also a prophecy. The cloud, which promised the long expected rain, appeared at the seventh time. The walls of Jericho fell down after they had been compassed seven times, on the seventh day (Josh. vi. 15-20). Naaman was cleansed after he had washed seven times (2 Kings v. 14). There are seventy-seven generations from Adam to Christ.—*Wordsworth.*

Verses 44, 45. All the merciful works of God seem small and unimportant in the beginning, but thence they are seen to be nobler and greater in the end. Let the man rejoice who sees even so much as a little cloud of divine mercy and peace arising upon the horizon of his life! The time approaches when this cloud will cover his whole heaven. When the hour strikes, help comes in with mighty power; and, to put thy mistrust to shame, it must come unexpectedly.—*Lange.*

Verse 44. "There ariseth a little cloud like a man's hand." The gradual development of the greatest good. 1. In the world of nature. 2. In the world of mind. 3. In the spiritual sphere. 4. In the aggre-

gate of national life. 5. In the conversion of the world to Christianity.

Verse 46. Divine strength. 1. Increases the capacity for physical endurance. 2. Makes us willing to occupy the humblest position to gain over the morally weak. 3. Prepares us for future obedience and service.

— The picture of the fleet runner is suggestive to the Christian of many profitable thoughts, and chiefly of this, that loyalty to God is simply "running in the way of His commandments." And with this let nothing interfere. Let us run in the right spirit, stripped of every encumbrance, with concentration of purpose, in humble reliance on God. Elijah-like, *in the way*, His strength and support shall never be wanting; for, "the hand of the Lord" shall be on us; and then, *in the end*, we shall have, what at least at Jezreel Elijah had not, the chaplet of glory to crown our brow. There is an old eastern tale of the swift Persian *Shatirs*. To one his sovereign had promised the hand of a princess if he accomplished in running a certain feat. Girt as tightly as possible, when to stoop was death, he ran for miles like a gazelle in front of the royal train. Alarmed at his success, and fearing the promise would have to be kept, the monarch dropped his whip; but, scarce pausing in his progress, the adroit, skilful runner picked it up with his foot. Next the monarch dropped his ring, and finding that *that* he could not recover with his foot, the runner exclaimed, "O King, you have broken your word, but I am true to the last"—stooped to the ground, picked up the ring with his finger, gave a deep groan of pain, fell down, and expired. But with God and the runner in the Christian race there is no deceit. He who has said, "So run that ye may obtain," will confer the mark of the high calling of God on the humblest who reaches the goal at the last.—*Howat*.

— Elijah, a true shepherd, he goes after the lost sheep, and leaves them not when he sees the wolf coming; but the Lord, who is neither weary nor faint, giveth power and strength to the faint, and to them that have no might, so that no way is too far, no toil too heavy.

CHAPTER XIX.

ELIJAH DEJECTED, REPROVED, AND ENCOURAGED.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 2. **So let the gods do to me**—The pl. אֱלֹהִים is used commonly for GOD, Jehovah; but here appears for Jezebel's idols. The *Sept.* prefixes to this oath the words, Εἰ σὺ εἶ Ἠλιοὺ καὶ ἐγὼ Ἰεζάβελ—"If thou art Elias, and I Jezebel." Verse 3. **And when he saw that**—וַיַּרְא may be future of רָאָה, *he saw*, or יָרֵא, *he feared*. Accordingly the *Sept.*, *Vulg.*, and *Peshito* read, "And he was afraid." But the former is preferable; for would Elijah be likely, after facing the Carmel ordeal, to take fright at this miserable threat of Jezebel? Verse 4. **Juniper tree**—Broom plant, "the most longed for and most welcome bush of the desert" (*Robinson*). It is enough—"I have already endured tribulation enough" (*Keil*). "I have now lived long enough" (*Lange*). Verse 6. **Cake baken on the coals**—On hot stones among ashes and coals (Gen. xviii. 6). Verse 8. **Went in the strength of that meat, &c.**—This does not state that he occupied forty days and forty nights in the journey to Horeb, distant only forty geographical miles from Beersheba, but that he went in the strength of that meat during that prolonged period; was supernaturally sustained by that supernaturally provided meal. Verse 9. **What doest thou here?**—Not a reproach, but an interrogation, designed to call out the depressed cry of his soul, that God might correct and alleviate his despondency. Verse 11. **Go forth, and stand upon the mount**—Go forth *to-morrow* (so *Sept.*, but without any authority). "To the complaint of the prophet, the Lord answers, first, by the *manifestation of His nature in deeds* (verses 11-14); and then

by the *declaration of His will in words* (verses 15-18)" *Keil.* Great and strong wind—earthquake—fire—Natural phenomena, calculated to impress the mind with Jehovah's power, and indicate the Divine resources for destruction of His enemies. Verse 12. Still small voice—דְּמָמָה קוֹל דַּקָּה, lit., *sound of a soft blowing.* This gentle phenomenon suggested, in contrast, the tenderness and compassionateness of God towards His people. Verse 13. Wrapped his face in his mantle—As even the seraphim veil their faces in reverent awe. Verse 18. Yet I have left me 7,000—To be taken as *future*: "I *will leave* in Israel." In the judgments which Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha shall execute, that number would remain faithful to Jehovah. Verse 20. Go back again; for what, &c.—לֵךְ שׁוּב. Luther renders, "Go (to thy parents), and come (then) again." (*Keil*) "Go, but return soon, for it is a great thing that thou shouldst be my successor." (*Lange*) "Return to thy parents as thou wishest; I have not intended to coerce thee; I leave the decision as to thy prophetic call to thy free will. What have I done to thee?—Bids him recognise the solemn meaning of the symbolical action in casting his mantle upon him. It laid him under obligation to assume the prophetic mission.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-18.

The Weak Moments of a Great Man.

I. Here we see a great man giving way to an unworthy fear (verses 1-3). 1. *Elijah quailed before the threat of an unscrupulous woman* (verse 2). The hero of Carmel is the coward of Jezreel. He who had overawed Ahab and the host of Baal worshippers found more than his match in Jezebel. He was not prepared for so sudden a collapse of the influence he had gained: he had expected that the bare rehearsal of the victory of Carmel would have subdued the idolatrous queen, and prepared her to listen with respect to the prophet, and to encourage the king in bringing about religious reform. On the contrary, all the wild, savage nature of the idol-enthusiast was aroused, and she swore a tremendous oath to be avenged for the slaughter of her priests by compassing the prophet's death. Like the *Lady Macbeth*, of the great English dramatist, her spirit of revenge might be expressed in similar terms:—

> Come, come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, and fill me
> Top-full of direst cruelty!
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose.

Elijah was seized with fear to which he had hitherto been a stranger, and trembled before the threat of a Jezebel. And alas! he is not the only brave and noble spirit who, after performing the most heroic exploits in the cause of morality and religion, has succumbed before the scowl and scorn of a wicked and deceitful woman. 2. *He deserted the post of duty from fear of death* (verse 3). For a lesser man to have run away might have been excused, but for Elijah to prove renegade was a calamitous blow to all trust in human greatness. The work of the prophet was so public and so important to the religious interests of the nation, that even the fear of death ought not to have prompted him to relinquish it: and had he been absolutely certain that God would not have interposed to protect him, and that to remain was death, how could he know but that the cause of Jehovah might be better promoted, and His name glorified, by his death than by his life? Of all men, we should have looked to Elijah for a display of the true martyr-spirit. But when faith in God is impaired, the loftiest fall and the bravest flee.

II. Here we see a great man giving way to querulousness and despair (verse 4). The disappointment of his expectations, the failure of his mission following so closely on the heels of such signal success, his long abstinence from food, and great physical exhaustion arising from rapid and extended travelling, would all tend to prostrate his powers; and when he sank down under the sheltering broom tree, he gave utterance to the deep dejection of his mind in the querulous words, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." Strange contradiction! says Kitto. Here the man who was destined not to taste of death, flees from death on the one hand, and seeks it on the other. And who told him it was *enough?* God did not. He knew what was enough for Elijah to do and to suffer. God had more to teach him, and more work for him to do. It is an affecting sight to see a great, strong man sink into helplessness and despair; and yet in the hour of disappointment and defeat many a gallant spirit has cried out for the oblivion of death! Desertion of duty—a fleeing from the word of God—is sure to be followed by trouble, and often the deepest mental anguish.

III. Here we see a great man miraculously sustained in the moment of his greatest weakness (verses 5-8). God granted Elijah not the oblivion of death, but the refreshing oblivion of sleep—riches to the poor, health to all; and while he was locked in the arms of forgetfulness, a repast was prepared for him by angel-hands, to which he was summoned by an angel's touch. In the strength of that meat he went forty days and forty nights across the platform of the Sinaitic desert, till he came to Horeb, the mount of God. "The journey" was not simply a pilgrimage to Horeb, which was less than two hundred miles distant, and might have been reached in six or seven days; it was to be a wandering in the wilderness, not unlike that of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt, only it was to last forty days instead of forty years. It was not without significance that Elijah was directed to Horeb: amid its sacred solitudes he was to learn a lesson never to be forgotten. God is a wise physician—food first; instruction, rebuke, after. He comes to man in the moment of his greatest helplessness, restores and strengthens him, and then prepares him for future usefulness and more splendid triumphs.

IV. Here we see a great man Divinely instructed. (verses 9-14). "What doest thou here?"—a question ever pertinent and timely. The answer of Elijah betrays in him what some have called "a spirit of pious fault-finding," and also a disposition to exalt himself above measure. He does not accuse Jehovah, but his words imply that he himself was the only saint in Israel, and it was too bad that Divine power had allowed idolatry so far to triumph. Elijah's notions of the Divine government were manifestly shaped too much by external displays of awful power, and he needed to learn a profounder lesson of the Divine nature. He is directed to "go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord" (verse 11), and in rapid succession the most demonstrative symbols of Jehovah's mighty power in storm, earthquake, and fire, pass before him. But not in these, but in the "still small voice," the prophet detected the true grandeur and comfort of the Divine presence. Humbled at the revelation, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and listened for further instruction. The thoughts under this heading may be arranged and treated in the following order:—1. *The pointed expostulation* (verse 9). 2. *The attempt at self-justification* (verse 10). 3. *The power of Divine gentleness* (verses 11-13). 4. *The influence of Divine gentleness not always immediately apparent* (verses 13, 14). The question is now put again to the prophet by the Lord himself. Will he have taken to heart the lesson of the great parable which has been acted before him, and make a humbler and more gentle answer? No; he is satisfied with his own statement of his case, and does but repeat his former words! "He has

been very jealous—he is left alone—his life is sought—he has done right, therefore, to quit an ungrateful country, and relinquish a thankless office."

V. Here we see a great man encouraged to return to the work he had forsaken (verses 15-18). The best remedy for dejection is work; absorbed in the duties of a lofty mission, man forgets his sorrow and regains his normal tone. Elijah is reminded that God did not overlook the sins of Israel, and he is instructed to anoint others who shall carry out His judgments against the house of Ahab. Again, Elijah had supposed he was alone in his witness for God. "It was a thought of anguish," says Maurice," and yet it was a thought of pride. He felt the misery of solitude, yet there was self-exaltation in it. "I alone am left, and they seek my life." No; there are seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Is it so indeed? What, Elijah, the great prophet, after all, does not know more than a multitude beside! He is not more faithful than they are! God has called them as well as him. Who can tell whether Elijah could have borne that discovery a few hours before? The still small voice had made it the most blessed of all discoveries That voice had taught him not to care whether he was better than his fathers, or better than his brethren; to desire only that God might be glorified in his strength and in his nothingness." It is at once a humiliation and an encouragement to reflect that man is only one amid a host of seen or unseen workers for God!

LESSONS:—1. *Great men are liable to failure.* 2. *Great men often fail at the point where they are considered strongest—the fearless become cawardly, the pure immoral, the honourable dishonest, &c.* 3. *God restores the erring soul by a method which is best suited at once to humble and encourage.*

ELIJAH'S DESPONDENCY.

If there were anything for which Elijah is remarkable, we should say it was superiority to human weakness. Like the Baptist, he dared to arraign and rebuke his sovereign; like the commander who cuts down the bridge behind him, leaving himself no alternative but death or victory, he taunted his adversaries, the priests of Baal, on Mount Carmel, making them gnash their teeth and cut themselves with knives, but at the same time ensuring for himself a terrible end, in case of failure, from his exasperated foes. Now it was this man—so stern, so iron, so independent, so above all human weakness—of whom it was recorded that in his trial hour he gave way to a fit of petulance and querulous despondency, to which there is scarcely found a parallel.

I. The causes of Elijah's despondency. 1. *Relaxation of physical strength.* On the reception of Jezebel's message, Elijah flies for his life, toils on the whole day, sits down under a juniper tree faint, hungry, and travel-worn, the gale of an Oriental evening, damp and heavy with languid sweetness, breathing on his face. The prophet and the man give way. He longs to die. You cannot mistake the presence of causes in part purely physical. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; of that constitution which, in our ignorance, we call union of soul and body, we know little respecting what is cause and what is effect. We would fain believe that the mind has power over the body, but it is just as true that the body rules the mind. Causes, apparently, the most trivial; a heated room, want of exercise, a sunless day, a northern aspect, will make all the difference between happiness and unhappiness, between faith and doubt, between courage and indecision. To our fancy there is something humiliating in being thus at the mercy of our animal organism. We would fain find nobler causes for our emotions. We talk of the hiding of God's countenance.

and the fiery darts of Satan But the picture given here is true. The body is the channel of our noblest emotions, as well as well as our sublimest sorrows. 2. *Want of sympathy.* "I, even I only, am left." Lay the stress on *only*. The loneliness of his position was shocking to Elijah. Surprising this: for Elijah wanted no sympathy in a far harder trial on Mount Carmel. It was in a tone of triumph that he proclaimed that he was the single, solitary prophet of the Lord, while Baal prophets were 450 men. Observe, however, the difference. There was in that case an opposition which could be grappled with; here there was nothing against which mere manhood was availing. The excitement was passed, the chivalrous look of the thing gone. To die as a martyr; yes, that were easy, in grand failure; but to die as a felon, to be hunted, caught, taken back to an ignominious death—flesh and blood recoiled from that. And Elijah began to feel that popularity is not love. The world will support you when you have constrained its votes by a manifestation of power, and shrink from you when power and greatness are no longer on your side. "I, even I only, am left." What greater minds like Elijah's have felt intensely, all we have felt in our own degree. Not one of us but what has felt his heart aching for want of sympathy. We have had our lonely hours, our days of disappointment, and our moments of hopelessness—times when our highest feelings have been misunderstood, and our purest met with ridicule—days when our heavy secret was lying unshared like ice upon the heart. And then the spirit gives way: we have wished that all were over; that we could lie down tired, and rest like the children, from life; that the hour was come when we could put down the extinguisher on the lamp, and feel the last grand rush of darkness on the spirit. Now the final cause of this capacity for depression—the reason for which it is granted us—is that it may make God necessary. In such moments it is felt that sympathy beyond human is needful. Alone, the world against him, Elijah turns to God: "It is enough, now, *O Lord.*" 3. *Want of occupation.* As long as Elijah had a prophet's work to do—severe as that work was—all went on healthily; but his occupation was gone. To-morrow, and the day after, what has he left on earth to do? The misery of having nothing to do proceeds from causes voluntary or involuntary in their nature. Multitudes of our race, by circumstances over which they have no control, in single life or widowhood, in straightened circumstances, are compelled to endure lonely days, and still more lonely nights and evenings. They who have felt the hours hang so heavy can comprehend part of Elijah's sadness. The law of life is, in the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread. No man can evade that law with impunity. Like all God's laws, it is its own executioner. It has strange penalties annexed to it. Would you know them? Go to the park or the esplanade, or the solitude after the night of dissipation, and read the penalties of being useless in the sad, jaded, listless countenances—nay, in the very trifles which must be contrived to create excitement artificially. Yet these very eyes could, dull as they are, beam with intelligence; on many of those brows is stamped the mark of possible nobility. The fact is, that the capacity of ennui is one of the signatures of man's immortality. It is his very greatness which makes inaction misery. If men with souls live only to eat and drink and be amused, is it any wonder if life be darkened with despondency? 4. *Disappointment in the expectation of success.* On Carmel the great object for which Elijah had lived seemed on the point of being realized. Baal's prophets were slain—Jehovah acknowledged with one voice—false worship put down. Elijah's life aim—the transformation of Israel into a kingdom of God—was all but accomplished. In a single day all this bright picture was annihilated. The tradesman sees the noble fortune for which he lived, every coin of which is the representative of so much time and labour spent, squandered by a spendthrift son. The purest statesmen find themselves at last neglected, and rewarded by defeat. Almost never can a man look back on life and say that its anticipations have been realized. For

the most part life is disappointment, and the moments in which this is keenly realized are moments like this of Elijah's.

II. God's treatment of Elijah's despondency. 1. *First He recruited His servant's exhausted strength.* Miraculous meals are given—then Elijah sleeps, wakes, and eats; on the strength of that goes forty days' journey. In other words, like a wise physician, God administers food, rest, and exercise, and then, and not till then, proceeds to expostulate; for before, Elijah's mind was unfit for reasoning. Persons come to the ministers of God in seasons of despondency; they pervert with marvellous ingenuity all the consolation which is given them, turning wholesome food into poison. Then we begin to perceive the wisdom of God's simple homely treatment of Elijah, and discover that there are spiritual cases which are cases for the physician rather than the divine. 2. *Next Jehovah calmed his stormy mind by the healing influences of Nature.* He commanded the hurricane to sweep the sky, and the earthquake to shake the ground. He lighted up the heavens till they were one mass of fire. All this expressed and reflected Elijah's feelings. The mode in which nature soothes us is by finding meeter and nobler utterance for our feelings than we can find in words—by expressing and exalting them. In expression there is relief. Elijah's spirit rose with the spirit of the storm. Stern, wild defiance, strange joy, all by turns were imaged there. Observe, *God* was not in the wind, nor in the fire, nor in the earthquake. It was Elijah's stormy self reflected in the moods of the tempest, and giving them their character. Then came a calmer hour. Elijah rose in reverence, felt tenderer sensations in his bosom. He opened his heart to gentler influences, till at last, out of the manifold voices of nature, there seemed to speak, not the stormy passions of the man, but the "still small voice" of the harmony and the peace of God. There are some spirits which must go through a discipline analogous to that sustained by Elijah. The storm-struggle must precede the still small voice. There are minds which must be convulsed with doubt before they can repose in faith; there are hearts which must be broken with disappointment before they can rise into hope. 3. *Besides, God made Elijah feel the earnestness of life.* What *doest* thou here, Elijah? Life is for doing—a prophet's life for nobler doing—and the prophet was not doing, but moaning. Such a voice repeats itself to all of us, rousing us from our lethargy, or our despondency, or our protracted leisure, "What doest thou here"—here in this short life? There is work to be done, evil put down, God's church purified, good men encouraged, doubting men directed, a country to be saved, time going, life a dream, eternity long, one chance, and but one for ever. What *doest thou* here? Then he went on further: "Arise, go on thy way." That speaks to us: on thy way. Be up and doing; fill up every hour, leaving no crevice or craving for a remorse or a repentance to creep through afterwards. Go! return on thy way, if thou art desponding—*on thy way*, health of spirit will return. 4. *God completed the cure by the assurance of victory* (verse 18). So, then, Elijah's life had been no failure after all. Seven thousand at least in Israel had been braced and encouraged by his example, and silently blessed him, perhaps, for the courage which they felt. In God's world, for those that are in earnest, there is no failure. No work truly done, no word earnestly spoken, no sacrifice freely made, was ever made in vain. We turn naturally from this scene to a still darker hour and more august agony. If ever failure seemed to rest on a noble life, it was when the Son of man, deserted by his friends, heard the cry which proclaimed that the pharisees had successfully drawn the net around their Divine victim. Yet, from that very hour of defeat and death, there went forth the world's life; from that very moment of apparent failure there proceedeth forth into the ages the spirit of the conquering Cross. Surely, if the Cross says anything, it says that apparent defeat is real victory, and that there is a heaven for

those who have *nobly and truly* failed on earth. Distinguish, therefore, between the real and the apparent. Elijah's apparent success was in the shout of Mount Carmel. His real success was in the unostentatious, unsurmised obedience of the seven thousand who had taken his God for their God.

LESSONS:—1. For all teachers who lay their heads down at night, sickening over their thankless task. Remember the power of *indirect* influences—those which distil from a life, not from a sudden brilliant effort. The former never fail: the latter often. 2. For ministers, again, what is ministerial success? Crowded churches, full aisles, attentive congregations, the approval of the religious world—much impression produced? Elijah thought so: and when he found out his mistake, and discovered that the applause on Mount Carmel subsided in hideous stillness, his heart well-nigh broke with disappointment. Ministerial success lies in altered lives and obedient, humble hearts: unseen work recognized in the Judgment Day. 3. Get below appearances, below glitter and show. Plant your foot upon reality; not in the jubilee of the myriads on Carmel, but in the humble silence of the hearts of the seven thousand, lay the proof that Elijah had not lived in vain.—*F. W. Robertson.*

THE SUBDUING POWER OF THE DIVINE WHISPER.

Elijah hastened first to the court to find the queen overwhelmed with defeat and humiliation; but Jezebel, so far from being terrified into conviction by the appalling wonders of Carmel, was preparing to take his life. This was so heavy and sudden a blow to Elijah's faith in the converting power of judgments, that courage and dignity forsook him for a time, and he fled like a frighted deer because a woman had threatened him! An angel of God found him in the wilderness of Beersheba, lying under a juniper tree, bitterly complaining of his lot, and praying the Lord to take his life. It was now that Jehovah explained to His servant, by the impressive signs described in these verses, that power might avenge and destroy, but could not win; that the silent intellectual process of instruction and spiritual influence can alone reach the heart, and change the man. The theatre of these signs was Horeb, celebrated of old for displays of the Divine terrors. Here Moses saw the flaming majesty of the I AM in the bush. Here was Sinai, the mount that might be touched, that burned with fire, and trembled when the trump of God gave forth the voice of words. Recalling these events, and impressed by these associations, Elijah, after a journey of forty days, drew near to this Horeb, the mount of God; and, entering a cave or grot hollowed out in one of its sides, he lodged there. There God found him. "What dost thou here, Elijah?" The prophet answered, in a distempered mood, that he had been jealous for the Lord of Hosts: that in spite of all he had done to reclaim Israel, the Divine covenants were yet broken, the altars profaned, the prophets slain, and himself, the sole remaining witness for the truth, they were seeking to destroy. Then the Lord commanded the melancholy and despairing seer to ascend to the top of the mount; and while he stood there, surrounded by bleak and barren hills, fit images of power and desolation, the Lord passed by in a succession of grand and suggestive phenomena. There were four signs; of which three were material, and the fourth intellectual. 1. A strong wind swept by, rending the imbedded cliffs of Horeb, and scattering them like stubble. The stormy soul of Elijah found a congenial element in this untamed and mighty agent; and he, perhaps, wished he could ride upon its wings, turn its head toward Samaria, and demolish the usurpation of Baal. But while he watched for some particular appearance to indicate the presence of Jehovah, some strange glory or voice, to show that the hurricane was a fit chariot for the career of God, the storm fell; and the prophet knew that the Lord was not in the wind.

2. Then followed another sign, more terrific than a tempest. Perhaps in all nature there is nothing which so nearly resembles what we should think to be the immediate interposition of God as an earthquake. "After the wind an earthquake." As the prophet felt that ancient and lofty pile of hills apparently immortal in their steadfastness, give way beneath his feet, writhing helplessly in the grasp of some unseen power, like a convulsed child, he must have thought, "Surely God is here! These fearful shakings and hurlings are the tokens of His dread presence;" and he might have repeated to himself the triumphant chant of a psalm he had often sung, "What ails ye, ye mountains, that ye skip like rams; and ye little hills like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob." But the Lord was not in the earthquake; the convulsions subsided without a sign. 3. The third wonder that passed before the eye of the now perplexed prophet was an element as destructive as an earthquake, but far more imposing. Shining above the brightness of the sun, roaring and consuming, a huge fire played about the rocks on which Elijah stood. And as he saw its nimble tongues of flame lick up the hard verdure of the ground, and split and melt the rocks with its devouring heat, he knew that this fierce brightness had been from the beginning a chosen vehicle of Jehovah. He remembered Sodom and Gomorrah; he remembered Sinai, part of the very hill that now blazed around him, when lightnings had accompanied the declaration of law, and he probably waited to receive from that fire another commandment for Israel. There stood the stern man in the midst of devastation. The wind had shaken, the earthquake had swallowed up, the fire had consumed; but God had not spoken! The prophet had been awed, but not instructed. He had gone to the mount doubtful, dissatisfied, perhaps, self-condemned; the material signs gave him no relief. They were splendid and dreadful, but there was no mind in them. 4. While he thus stood bewildered, debating with himself what this might mean, the last sign explained all: it was a *still small voice*. It was still, because no sound struck audibly on the ear; it was small, because no ostentatious medium conveyed it; it was the voice of mind whispering to mind. God spake to Elijah, and without any symbol there were thoughts interchanged that bowed the prophet's soul to the dust. And it came to pass when Elijah heard it, or felt it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and returned to his cave, standing in the entrance to hear the voice again, as if repeating the words of Samuel—"*Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.*"

I. My dear brethren, that which bows the mind, that which makes a man wrap his face in his mantle in silent and intelligent reverence, is not a sign that strikes upon the senses, but a thought understood and felt in the heart. Miracles have an historic value, but they have seldom produced in those who witnessed them a moral benefit; neither error nor vice can spring from a miracle, nor can either be rejected by a miracle: they arise from the connection of mind with mind, and must be destroyed by a new mental fellowship.

II. This will be manifest if we follow the course of the Divine revelation. The patriarchs transmitted a few simple and fixed beliefs; the Jewish economy dispensed miracles and types; the knowledge of God became more defined and enlarged; it was systematized in laws, but national and local in its application. When Christ came, He made the gospel the subject and instrument of teaching, fulfilling the prediction—*And they shall be all taught of God.* Divine knowledge, in coming down to us from the past, has become more and more a voice speaking to the heart, more and more free from material mediums. When Abraham embraced the knowledge of God, it was on its way to *us;* when Moses lodged it in the Jewish Tabernacle, it was purifying itself for us; when Christ found it there, and baptized it with the Holy Ghost and with fire, He sent it forth to us. It is now doing its greatest work, not by flood and fire, although there are cities

in the world as wicked as Sodom; not by miracles, although there is as hard a scepticism as ever reigned in Judea or Rome; but by the *still small voice* of instruction, supported and carried out to gracious results by the silent communion of the Holy Ghost.

III. These are the last and crowning means of Christianity; everything else, by whatever name you call it, belongs to the three first signs. And what a fondness we have for these signs, the picturesque and the striking! But what do they gain who seek to embellish the church with a gorgeous architecture; who cultivate the sublimity of domes and capitals; who subdue by a solemn colouring the very light that falls upon the worshippers; who place in imposing situations the picture, the statue, the emblem; who burnish their altars with gold, and bring to the holy crucifix the homage of tapers and the genuflexions of surplice and mitre; who enter the assembly with the music of chanted litanies, and terrify the people by the thunder of anathemas? The Lord is not in the architecture, the picture, the music, the pomp; you see no more here than the three signs of the prophet. You must seek the Lord in the voice of the conscience; this is the sign of the gospel dispensation—the word, and not the picture; Christ, and not the crucifix; the Holy Ghost, and not the seven candles.

IV. If we stop with the three signs, we go no farther than the heathen. The negro falls down before the whirlwind and the earthquake, and cries, Lo! God is here! The Parsee worships the shining fire. But their impressions are sensuous and temporary; fading before the heart is touched, for the still small voice of instruction is wanting. Look at the people around us! We see whole nations prostrate before the three signs. To the Hindu the splendours of Hinduism are the whirlwind, the earthquake, and the fire; and his homage is fear and admiration. When I have seen an idol arrayed in traditionary terrors, and magnificently paraded through the streets of a large native town—and in the night too—and when ten thousand human beings have pressed near to worship amid the gleaming of innumerable torches of coloured lights, and rockets and candles of every device shooting up into the air, and when the priests have sung in solemn cadence, and the multitudes have shouted their acclamations, I have caught the prevailing awe. With all my better knowledge, I could not resist the terror and beauty of the spectacle; *but the Lord was not there.* The multitudes returned to the homes with an intoxicated sense, and a fevered imagination; but no silent voice to instruct and win them to God. But I have taken one of those Hindus whom the earthquake and the fire had dazzled, but not changed; I have drawn him away from the three signs, and invited him to await with me for the fourth; and while we listened, a still small voice spoke in our hearts; and when he heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and cried, *What must I do to be saved?* And the effect of that voice was a new heart and a new life. It was the silent winning of Calvary, and not the fiery testimony of Carmel. It was not Moses or Elijah thundering forth the law upon the senses, but Jesus breathing truth and grace into the soul.

V. Have you ever bowed before this voice, and hidden your face in penitence? Perhaps, amid the clamour and discord of louder voices, the still accents of Jesus escaped you. We cannot catch the sound without profound listening. When we do hear it, speaking pardon from the Cross, speaking help from the right hand of God, speaking victory in the conflict—

> 'Tis music in the sinner's ear,
> 'Tis life, and health, and peace.

For the comfort of those who have been terrified by the storm and fire of the law, I am commanded to promise that the blessed sign of a Saviour's presence

shall follow. You have been convinced of sin; have quaked beneath the threatenings of Horeb; a storm of distemper and doubt is rending your soul. But follow Elijah's example; wait, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. The thick cloud of sin shall pass away before the still small voice of heavenly peace.—*E. E. Jenkins' Madras Sermons.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-8. Elijah under the juniper tree. How are the mighty fallen! He who stands before us in the preceding chapter as the fearless champion of the God of Israel, putting to shame the worshippers of Baal, and slaying his prophets, is presented to us in this chapter as being overcome with fear, the victim of cowardice and despondency. He who could boldly defy the king is now terrified by the threat of a vile and angry queen, and flees for his life, until the shade of a juniper tree in the wilderness affords shelter to his exhausted frame. I. *His dejection.* "He requested for himself that he might die." This is the feeling which dejection generally awakens, the desire to be separated from the object of trial or annoyance. Whenever men's hearts fail them in any work, their first wish is to get away from it. This will account for the frequent instances we hear of desertion from the post of duty. In this dejection of Elijah we have an instance of men breaking down in the strong point of their character. He was fearless, bold, and courageous, yet these were the points on which he failed—he was afraid of Jezebel. Moses was the meekest man, yet it was for impatience and anger that he was excluded from Canaan. Peter was fearless and impetuous, yet he denied his Lord. Men generally fear their weak points, their besetting sins; but they have need to fear as well those they think strong. What were the causes of his dejection? 1. Physical exhaustion. The anxiety and excitement of Carmel would be extremely exhausting to him. After such a strain there would come a reaction; the nerves unstrung —irritable; taking a gloomy view of things. This is the common experience of those who suffer from bodily exhaustion. 2. Disappointment. Elijah in all likelihood expected that after the scenes on Carmel the whole of Israel, including Ahab and the royal house, would be converted and restored to God. He would think that the evidence afforded would be irresistible in favour of Jehovah. But instead of Jezebel being converted, she was enraged, and her enmity increased. At this unexpected result, the prophet would be disappointed, and his heart would sink within him. 3. Eclipse of faith. The figure of Jezebel so appeared before him as to hide or obscure his vision of God. When he saw "*that*," the threat, he arose, and went for his life. "The God before whom I stand," were the words with which he confronted Ahab, and he was as bold as a lion. Now he saw nothing but Jezebel's threat, and fear takes hold upon him. Men are strong and steadfast only as they see God. Let anything obscure this vision, and their strength is gone—in temptation, in work, in sorrow, in death.

II. *His recovery.* "And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat." There is no rebuke here. Men often notice the words *most* which are spoken in anger or irritation. But God passes over those which escaped Elijah's lips in his time of depression. They represented his despondency, not his real self. Undeterred, therefore, by the prophet's request for death, God provides him with food to refresh his exhausted frame. He also addressed to him words of kindness to comfort his mind: "The journey is too great for thee." What a beautiful instance is this of the watchfulness and con-

sideration with which God attends His servants. In their times of despondency and difficulty they may forget Him, and wander from His ways, but he does not forget them, or leave them to themselves.— *The Study and the Pulpit.*

Verses 2, 3. **The tyranny of fear.** 1. May overpower the bravest spirit. 2. Is intensified when life is threatened with a cruel termination. 3. May be wielded by the most contemptible individual. 4. Drives the hitherto dauntless worker from the post of duty.

Verse 2. Neither scourges nor favours can work anything with the obstinately wicked. All evil hearts are not equally disaffected to good: Ahab and Jezebel were both bad enough, yet Ahab yields to that work of God which Jezebel stubbornly opposeth. Ahab melts with that water, with that fire, wherewith Jezebel is hardened; Ahab was bashfully, Jezebel audaciously, impious. The weaker sex is ever commonly stronger in passion, and more vehemently carried with the sway of their desires, whether to good or evil. She swears and stamps at those whereat she should have trembled; she swears by those gods of hers, which were not able to save their prophets, that she will kill the prophet of God, who had scorned her gods, and slain her prophets.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 3. Strange spectacle! The man at whose words, but yesterday, the fire of Jehovah miraculously fell, and five hundred and fifty false prophets were slain, now flies for his life before the threat of an idolatrous queen! Jehovah seems to have left him for a season to himself. Perhaps there was danger that, like the Apostle, he might become exalted above measure by the abundance of revelation and of power which were manifested through him, and it was needful to remind him by an impressive experience that he was still a man encompassed with human passions and infirmities. To many it may seem that a great opportunity to reform the worship of the kingdom was lost by Elijah's flight. The people were convinced. Ahab was awed to reverent silence and submission. Only Jezebel and Asherah priests seem to have remained an obstacle in the way of reform; and how easily might they have been removed by the Divine power which had already wrought such wonders! So we might judge. But there is a point beyond which Divine power will not multiply miracles, and the turning-point here was the instability of Ahab. He had the power, and ought to have shown the courage, to silence the ravings of his impious wife, and to command his household and the whole kingdom to keep the way of the Lord. But he was governed by his wife, became false to his deepest convictions of truth, and Jehovah would proceed no further at that time to magnify His name. But the moral lessons of the scene at Carmel have never been lost. Though failing to reform the king and the nation, they speak to every after age, and form a part of that Divine revelation which claims the admiration and reverence of all that desire to know and worship the true God.—*Whedon.*

— The fear and flight of Elijah are very remarkable. But yesterday he was a conqueror in the full glory of an unprecedented triumph, imposing his will as law on king and people. To-day he is an outcast, a fugitive, broken down in spirit, only anxious to place the greatest possible distance between himself and his enemies. What had produced the extraordinary change? Not, probably, Jezebel's threat alone, but in part, perhaps, physical reaction from the over-excitement of the preceding day: in part, internal disquietude and doubt as to the wisdom of the course which he had adopted.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verses 4-13. **The prophet's hour of darkness.** We learn more from example than from precept. The human weakness of Scripture charac-

bers, as well as their spiritual strength, is shown us. We are taught as much by the one as by the other. I. *The human sorrow.* After the prophet's triumph came his time of depression. 1. When Elijah overcame the prophets of Baal it was his time of triumph. Then came the reaction. He heard of Jezebel's threat, and fled into the kingdom of Judah. We can picture to ourselves the wearied old man resting under the shade of the juniper tree. He complained of the failure of his life, and desired to die. Then there fell upon him sleep, God's gift to the wretched. Thus it is with us; after our time of triumph comes our time of reaction. In the day of joy we scarcely believe it, but it is so. It is very difficult to make the child who has never before seen the sea understand that in a few hours the waters will have ebbed from the bay, and left it covered with long stretches of brown-ribbed sand and jagged rocks. 2. It is so in the Christian life. We may have our hours of rapture, but they will be succeeded by our hours of depression. The glow of first love will not always last. Nor is it well that it should. It is beautiful, but not deep. The flowers must fall from the fruit tree, if the autumn store is to hang on its boughs. If it were not so, we should walk by sight, not by faith. 3. It is so with temptation. Our sins often seem to be trodden down; but unless we are careful, they will rise again. It may be painful to be told this, but it is true, and therefore it is well to know it. 4. Is, then, our religion a delusion? By no means. It is a discipline. Look at the Saviour's hour of trial; it came after the glorious life, and before he was able to throw open the gates of immortality to all believers. 5. After trial, God sends sleep, or rest. "He giveth his beloved sleep." II. *The Divine consolation.* 1. But the time of refreshment came: it was the darkness before the daybreak, not the darkness of death; yet the deliverance was not such as the prophet wished. He was a wanderer for forty days more before he saw the morning. Thus it is with us; our gloom lasts a long time, but not for ever. We do not understand Christ's way of working. We want to arrange everything. Yet it were better to put a child to manage machinery than entrust us with the concerns of our own lives. 2. The prophet said all was dark, that there was no godliness left in the land. But the Lord showed him that it was not so evil as he feared—seven thousand had not bowed the knee to Baal. 3. After his journey of forty days, when he was at Horeb, the Lord commanded him to stand upon the Mount. First there came a whirlwind which rent the rocks, then an earthquake, and afterwards a fire. But God was not in these. With any of these forces He could have destroyed the guilty king and queen; but such was not His way of working. Last of all came a still small voice; and by this Jehovah spoke to His servant. Thus God comes to us, and speaks to us, not with a voice of desolation, but with a whisper of love. The wind, the earthquake, the fire, are the law: the still small voice is the Gospel. Christ thus addresses us, and by it assures us of returning peace.

LESSONS:—1. *Our day of triumph is not always our day of prosperity.* 2. *In the silence of the desert, and the solitude of our hearts, we have our deepest communion with God.* 3. *He speaks to us, not in a voice of terror, but by the quiet consolations of the Gospel of forgiveness and peace.—Pulpit Analyst.*

Verse 4. Despondency. 1. The reaction from a state of high mental excitement. 2. Renders the victim indifferent to physical sustenance. 3. Indulges in excessive self-deprecation. 4. Seeks relief in personal oblivion.

Verses 5-8. The visit under the juniper tree. The guardianship of Divine grace becomes evident. 1. In the hearing vouchsafed to the prophet's prayer. 2. In the appearance

of an angel which the Lord sends to him. 3. In the wonderful nourishment which he experiences. 4. In the delightful prospect which God opens before him. 5. In a supernatural strengthening for his wandering through the wilderness.—*Krummacher.*

— Divine succour. 1. Is administered in extremity. 2. Is supplied by unexpected agencies. 3. Affords strength in a time of unusual but salutary trial.

— Oh! the never-ceasing care and providence of the Almighty; not to be barred by any place, by any condition! When means are wanting to us, when we are wanting to ourselves, when to God, even then doth He follow us with His mercy, and cast favour upon us, beyond, against expectation! What variety of purveyance doth He make for His servant! One while the ravens, then the Sareptan, now the angel shall be his caterer; none of them without a miracle; those other provided for him waking, this sleeping. Oh, God! the eye of Thy providence is not dimmer, the hand of Thy power is not shorter; only teach Thou us to serve Thee—to trust Thee.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 5. There have been in all ages faithful servants of God and Christ, who have been weakened and discouraged by the thought that it was all in vain, all their anxiety and labour were fruitless, nothing more could possibly be gained for the Lord, and no more work of any importance could be done by them for His cause and kingdom, and they have been on the point of finding joyous, spirited, zealous work in the service of the Lord —nay, even life itself—distasteful. But they have always found consolation from the Lord in His Word, and have been aroused and strengthened by His Spirit to new courage and to unremitted perseverance in their work for the truth. They have learned to think of Him who endured similar contradiction of sinners against Himself. The Lord Jesus Christ had taught them not to estimate the value of their labour according to the effect which they produced by it, nor according to the visible results perceptible to themselves, but with joy and confidence to persevere unweariedly, even though it should appear as though all they said was addressed to an uninhabited desert.—*Menken.*

Verse 8-18. Elijah on Mount Horeb. 1. The wonderful consolation which he enjoyed on his journey thither. 2. The exalted revelation which he there received. 3. The new duties and encouragements which were his lot even there.—*Bender.*

— The lessons Elijah learned at Horeb were full of instruction. The symbols of wind, earthquake, and fire, followed by the still small voice, have a wide and varied significance and application. 1. The central lesson of these symbols is, that there are mightier influences at work in human history than *physical force.* Men are ever prone to think otherwise, or, at least, to disregard this fact. That which is tangible to the outer senses, which blows, and shakes, and burns before the eyes of men; confounding and confusing, and, for the time, overwhelming and crushing all opposition—that is too apt to exhaust all our ideas of mightiness. We should, therefore, be reminded that in the silent workings of mind and heart there are often developed forces stronger than the whirlwind, mightier than the earthquake shock, and fiercer in their burnings than fires which many waters cannot quench. In this we may discover just the relation of miracles to the truth, which they have often served to introduce and confirm. We are in danger of esteeming the former above the latter, whereas the law and the prophets and Christ have taught a different lesson. The seven thousand devout hearts in Israel are a mightier power for good than even all the miracles of Elijah. So, too, Jesus taught his disciples that it is better to have one's name written in heaven than to have power to work miracles (Luke x. 20), and that the true believer, led by the Spirit, shall do even greater works than the Messiah.

2. The immediate application of this lesson was to Elijah's undue estimate of the miracles at Carmel. He seems to have supposed that the answer by fire that consumed his sacrifice, and the mighty wind and rain that came so quickly after, together with the slaughter of the false prophets, would accomplish the speedy reformation of Israel; but because they did not, he yielded to discouragement and despair. His radical error was in placing too much confidence in the outward and the marvellous. So the still small voice, as it developed itself into the sure word of prophecy, showed him how groundless was his despair, how mistaken his notions of Jehovah's ways, and how manifold might be other agencies of judgment yet at God's command. 3. At the same time, the lesson might remind him that the impious Jezebel from whom he fled, and who now, after all his work against her gods, seemed to be triumphant still, was trusting in the outward appearance of power at her command. She might array against him and his fellow-prophets all the forces of government, and all the pomp and pretensions of the idolatry to which she was devoted; but these would soon exhaust themselves, for God would not be in them. The wind and fire of her presumptuous wrath would soon pass by, and after all its fury was spent, there would rise the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal; a silent force, perchance, but, with God in them, mightier far than all that could come against them. 4. But the deeper and grander lesson of these symbols is the contrast they present between the Old Dispensation and the New—the Law and the Gospel. The miracles of the Exodus, the clouds and thunders and lightnings that attended the giving of the Law at this same Sinai, and all the later marvels in the sacred history of Israel, only prepared the ear of man to catch more readily and appreciate more fully the gentle voice of Him who did not cry or lift up His voice in the streets, but still spake as no other man spake. The sweetest, holiest sound that ever steals upon the soul of man is the voice of the Word that was made flesh; and that voice, ever speaking in the Gospel, shall go forth throughout the earth, and its words unto the end of the world, until all idols fall, and all tongues confess that Jesus is the Christ.—*Whedon.*

Verse 9-14. The powerlessness of the terrible in moral teaching. Storm, earthquake, and fire, are the symbols of the Divine punishments exterminating the ungodly. God is not in the storm, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, to show that His sway in the theocracy is not implacable, annihilating vigour and all-consuming jealousy. Jehovah appears in the sound of a gentle blowing or soft murmur—the sign of the nearness of God—which is the love that endures the sinner with sparing mildness, with patience and long-suffering, and delays the punishment as long as mercy is possible. The acted parable is, in fact, an anticipation of the evangelical rule—a condemnation of that "zeal" which Elijah had gloried in, a zeal exhibiting itself in fierce and terrible vengeance; and an exaltation and recommendation of that mild and gentle temper which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Read in the light of after revelation, we can thus understand the true drift of this most marvellous scene; but it may be questioned how far Elijah was able to perceive its meaning. Perhaps he felt dimly something of the true force of the lesson; perhaps for a while it moderated his excessive zeal, and inclined him to gentler courses.—*Speaker's Comm.*

— Though I do not read in this story of Elijah's deep despondency the condemnation of his last act—the slaughter of the priests of Baal—I do see in it the natural effects of any great exercise of destructive power, perhaps of power at all, upon the mind of him to whom it has been entrusted. The sense of exhaustion, the cry, "I am no better than my fathers," though I have done such wonders; the hopeless-

ness of the future becoming all the more deep from the apparently useless triumph that had been won already—surely every prophet must have these bitter experiences, if he is not to sink into a Baal-worshipper, and after all to regard the God of Truth and Righteousness merely as a God of Might. Elijah, though he wrought so many miracles, was comparatively still a novice when he sat under the juniper tree. When he left the cave he was an initiated man. He had thought that the earthquake, the fire, the wind that rent the mountains, must be the great witnesses of the Lord. But He was not in *them*. Not they, but the still small voice, had that awe in it which forced the prophet to cover his face with his mantle. What a blessed and a beautiful conclusion of all the past history! What an interpretation of its meaning! The glaring outward signs, which the priests of Baal sought for, were feeble; the living power which spoke to the heart within, this only demanded and compelled reverence. He who could send bread to the woman of Zarephath was indeed the God who answered by fire.—*Maurice*.

Verses 9, 10. **Elijah at Horeb.** We may feel a little surprised to find him at Horeb, so far away from the kingdom of Israel, the place to which God had sent him to make known His will, and to fulfil His purpose. But it may be that Horeb had special attractions for him. It was far away from the scenes through which he had been passing, and it was in the midst of a mountainous region, away from the habitations of men, abounding in caves and ravines; so that its solitude and security would afford him a quiet retreat where he could rest awhile and feel secure from the wrath of his enemies. Its religious associations, too, would doubtless exert a healthy influence upon his mind. It was here that God appeared to Moses while tending the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law, and commissioned him to deliver His people from the bondage of Egypt. It afterwards became a place of encampment for the Israelites during their journey through the wilderness, and it was from the adjoining mountain of Sinai that God delivered to Moses the Ten Commandments. But he was not long left alone there. He little thought how he was watched, until he was surprised by the voice of the Lord. Notice—I. *The rebuke administered.* "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Elijah was now in a fit state, both of body and mind, to be dealt with. He was a deserter. It was necessary to make him feel his cowardice and his want of faith in God. When under the juniper tree, he was too weak in body and too dejected in mind to receive rebuke, and God dealt tenderly and considerately with him. But now he was stronger, and able to bear conviction. In this question he is rebuked for forsaking duty. He was sent to Israel as the messenger of God, and to remain there during the Divine pleasure. In former instances of his life God showed him when to leave and when to return, but now he did not wait for God's direction; he goes himself. He had chosen his own way, and so set God aside. He would be reminded of this by the question: "What doest thou *here?*"—so far away from the place whither he had been sent; as much as if God had asked him, "Who is to do the work in Israel when thou art here?" The question would also be a rebuke to his want of faith in God. What doest *thou* here? He, above all men, should have remained at his post. His past experience of God's favour should have served him now; his faith should have been strengthened by the remembrance of such favour, so that when Jezebel threatened him, he would have fled instinctively to Him who could restrain her wrath and protect his servants. How often do men still act as Elijah did? They forsake God's way, and choose their own. He has assigned them some special work, but they have withdrawn from it. And God follows them into their wanderings, as He followed Elijah, and proposes the same question to them, Sinner! backslider! lukewarm professor! what doest thou *here?* II.

The defence. He does not frankly acknowledge his error, and come to God with a penitent heart, seeking to be restored, but he seeks to justify himself, and that upon these grounds. 1. Former service. "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." He looked with satisfaction upon his past labours, and claimed some merit because of them, and that now he might retire from his arduous toil. Thus he clung to a feeling of self-righteousness. He overlooked his obligation to God. As it was God who called him to work, so it was for God to release him from it. 2. Isolation. "I, even I only, am left." No doubt he felt weary of continuing his work by himself, without sympathy from anyone. But, admitting the influence of loneliness, his service had not been a very long one—three and a-half years at the utmost. And he overlooked the never-failing presence of God. Our Lord experienced this loneliness, but He did not yield to it. He said, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me." 3. Persecution. "They seek my life, to take it away." He shrunk from the opposition which his enemies now raised against him, and fled from it, thinking he was justified in doing so. But he had been in as much danger before, when the king had searched the country for him. He forgot this, and forgot also the Arm by which he was then protected. These are the grounds upon which Elijah sought to defend his conduct before God. But that defence reveals to us a departure from God. He had lost, for the time, faith in God; his heart was not aglow with love and devotion to Him. These were the true reasons of his being at Horeb. And the example of Elijah is often imitated by those who wander from God, and who are arrested in their wanderings by the question: "What doest thou here?" The sinner will excuse himself—time enough yet—a more convenient season. The backslider may blame difficulties, associates, change of circumstances. The lukewarm Christian hides himself beneath the increase of other duties, want of success in his work for God, weariness. All these excuses reveal a departure from God in heart, and the only safe course is to acknowledge this, and return to Him at once.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

Verse 10. **Elijah's zeal for the Lord.** 1. *A pure and sincere zeal.* It was solely for the Lord, not for himself, for his opinion, honour, glory, or advantage, just as with the apostle who counted all things but loss that he might win Christ (Phil. iii. 8). How often folly, dogmatism, passion, and injustice are mingled with zeal for the Lord and for His kingdom! Would that all who would be, or pretend to be, zealous for the cause of God, could stand before the Searcher of hearts and say in sincerity, I have been zealous for the Lord. 2. *A persevering and regardless zeal.* Like Paul, he shrunk from no distress or labour, from no strife or affliction, nor hunger, nor nakedness, neither scoffing nor disgrace (Phil. iv. 12, 13; 2 Cor. vi. 4-10). He had no respect of persons, did not ask whether he was a king, serving Baal, or a beggar; whether he was lord or servant; whether his opponents were few or many. It could be said of him—The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. How few of those have any knowledge of such a zeal, who follow their calling mechanically, and never become warm in its behalf; whose zeal is like a smothered fire, and grows less and inefficient, and cools, both when temptation arises, and when they are in prosperity.—*Lange.*

Verses 11-17. **The disclosure on the mount.** We learn from this incident—1. *That men are not brought to acknowledge God merely by outward manifestations of power or greatness.* Elijah needed this lesson. Our Lord, in the days of His flesh, constantly met with those who sought signs and wonders as the only means of producing faith. The rich man prayed that Lazarus might be sent to warn his five brethren, pleading that if one went to them from the dead, they would repent. And the same feeling is still shown by men in the importance they attach to

some outward circumstances for producing repentance—calamity, bereavement, affliction. Others look with great confidence to special means or special men, the various revivalistic agencies, revival preachers, thinking that without these the work of God cannot be promoted. We need to learn that all these may be present to us, and still God be absent. 2. *That outward circumstances may be helpful in bringing men to acknowledge God.* While some depend too much upon the outward and circumstantial, others go to the opposite extreme, and ignore them altogether in the work of God, whereas they have a place in that work. Calamity or affliction may not produce repentance, but they tend to subdue the spirit, and make it more susceptible to the work of God. They break up the fallow ground, and prepare it for the seed of truth. 3. *That true repentance is produced by the voice of God.* It was when Elijah heard the still small voice that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood at the entrance of the cave. He had been prepared for such submission by the terrible displays he had witnessed. And so, when the voice of God speaks to the conscience of the guilty, or to the heart of the sorrowful, there comes peace to the one and comfort to the other. 4. *That Christian work is needful to spiritual health.* Elijah was commanded to return to the wilderness of Damascus, and to do the work assigned him. He obeyed, and we never read of him wandering away again. Many Christians get low-spirited, and wander into forbidden paths, because of inactivity. Earnest work for God would restore and preserve them.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

Verse 11. Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord! This call is issued to all those who, like Elijah, lodge in caves and dens. The caves, however, are of various kinds. Our heart is a cave, a dark tomb. The soul attacked and tormented by doubts is in a cave. Bodily distress and external affliction may be called a cave. O, go forth and go upon the mount, and look aloft to Him who hangs upon the tree. Go forth! spread the wings of hope, soar and place thyself upon the heights of the everlasting promises of God, which are yea and amen, and from thence cast a look of confidence into the heart of Him whose council is truly wonderful, but who, nevertheless, doeth all things gloriously.—*Krummacher.*

Verse 12. In that God was! Behold, in that gentle and mild breath there was omnipotency; there was but powerfulness in those fierce representations; there is not always the greatest efficacy where is the greatest noise. God loves to make way for Himself by terror; but he conveys Himself to us in sweetness. It is happy for us if, after the gusts and flashes of the law, we have heard the soft voice of evangelical mercy.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 15-18. The answer of the Lord to Elijah. Includes—1. *A direction.* "Go, return!" which is the answer to—Thus far have I been zealous in vain. Carry forward the work already begun, doubting not the result; let thy hands fall not; fear not, for I am with thee. So the Lord always calls to all workers in the vineyard. 2. *A commission.* "Anoint Hazael," &c. That is the answer to—They have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars. Through Hazael will I chastise rebellious Israel, through Jehu destroy the house of Ahab, through Elisha preserve the order of the prophets. Observe how the royal government of the Lord influences so deeply and so powerfully, and yet so quietly and noiselessly, all human undertakings, contrivances, and conditions, all worldly events; and how so much happens under His direction which seems to happen without Him, as if by accident. 3. *A promise.* "Yet have I left, &c." This is the answer to—I only am left, and they seek my life. The race of believers will never perish; no storm, no earthquake, no fire will destroy them. They are the salt of the earth

which preserves the world from corruption and ruin.—*Lange.*

Verses 15-17. **Return to active duty the cure of despondency.** 1. The soul finds true health and vigour in obedience to God. 2. The example of a faithful worker is an inspiration to others. 3. The vengeance of God against evil-doers will never lack instruments to carry it out—Hazael, Jehu, Elisha.

Verse 18. **God's hidden ones.** 1. Exist in the worse times, and in the most unexpected places. 2. Illustrate the unremitting care of God over His persecuted people. 3. Are often made manifest for the encouragement of the solitary worker.

— Thou art deceived, O Elijah! Thou art not left alone; neither is all Israel tainted. God hath children and prophets in Israel, though thou see them not. Those clear eyes of the seer discern not the secret store of God: they looked not into Obadiah's caves, they looked not into the closets of the religious Israelites. According to the fashion of the wealthy, God pleaseth Himself in hidden treasures: it is enough that His own eyes behold His riches. Never did He, never will He, leave Himself unfurnished with holy clients, in the midst of the foulest depravations of His church. The sight of His faithful ones hath sometimes been lost, never the being. Do your worst, O ye gates of Hell! God will have his own. It was a true cordial for Elijah's solitariness that he had seven thousand invisible abettors; neither is it a small comfort to our weakness to have companions in good.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Learn. 1. Never to take too gloomy or desponding a view of the position and prospects of the Church. 2. Beware of harsh judgments on our fellow-men and fellow-Christians. 3. The influential power of a great example.—*Macduff.*

Verse 18. **The faithful seven thousand.** We learn from these words. 1. *That men may be often deceived with regard to the strength of God's church.* Many have possessed a similar feeling to that expressed by Elijah. They have looked upon the prevalence of sin, in all ranks and conditions of life; they have looked upon the wide-spread indifference to religion, and that, too, in the midst of religious privilege and effort; and at such a sight their hearts have failed them; they have thought that the people of God were very few, and they have been tempted to think that their efforts to increase the number were vain and useless, and under such temptation many have relinquished their work. Such thoughts and feelings as these often arise in consequence of ignorance and a partial view of the subject. And are we not often very narrow in our views of Christian life? We are apt to look for that life to manifest itself in one particular form; for those who profess discipleship to conform to one outward mode of conduct, without taking into consideration the difference of temperament, education, &c. God's spirit comes into men as they are; He does not change the constitution of their minds; He inspires the powers already there, and brings them into submission to His will. 2. *That God has a perfect knowledge of His own people.* The children of God may be unable to recognize each other, especially in times of persecution, which may restrain men from making an open avowal of their faith. And even in ordinary times there are many who may not feel called upon to make this avowal, so that their relation to God remains unknown to those around them. But God sees and knows them. 3. *That God can keep His people amid the most widespread sin and evil.* It is not without reason that Christian people fear for themselves and for others when sin and evil abound, and when temptations are numerous and powerful. They know their own weakness, and they know, too, how many have fallen in the conflict with sin. But they may be delivered from their fears by the assurance that God is able to keep that which they commit to Him. Nothing can separate

from the love of God. Trusting in Him, they shall never be confounded. 4. *That men should be faithful to their duty, and leave results with God.* Elijah was so discouraged at not seeing the result he looked for, that he shrank from his work, and fled from the post of duty. And many since his day have acted in a similar manner. They have looked for certain results to their labours, and have not seen them; then their hearts have failed them, and they have grown weary in well doing. They have forgotten that they were responsible for the faithful discharge of their duty, not for the results. And whilst they have been mourning over failure, their efforts may have been bringing forth fruit which they little thought of. And in the great harvest of the world, many who in this life mourned over a want of success to their efforts will find that their labours were not in vain.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 19-21.

The Divine Call to Duty.

These words describe the call of Elisha to the office and work of a prophet of Jehovah. The contrast between Elijah and Elisha was striking and complete. Elijah appears on the scene abruptly, without warning and with an unknown history; Elisha is first introduced to us as a domesticated man, at home with his father and mother, and familiar with the pastoral scenes and employments of the rich Jordan valley. Elijah is the solitary, haunting the grots and caves of the wilderness and the solitudes of the hills; Elisha tarries at Jericho (2 Kings ii. 18), is a frequent visitor at Shunem (2 Kings iv. 8, 9), has his own house in Samaria (2 Kings v. 9), and lingers now and again among the schools of the prophets (2 Kings iv. 38; vi. 1): Elijah is robed in a rough mantle of sheepskin, with his massy hair waving in long shaggy locks; Elisha is attired in the ordinary dress of the period, and with a shaven crown at which the young men mocked (2 Kings ii. 23): when Elijah appears in connection with kings and courts it is as their opponent; Elisha as their counsellor and friend: Elijah was fierce, furious, stern, unbending; Elisha gentle, peaceful, calm, approachable: Elijah was the bold, intrepid Luther of his age; Elisha the Melanchthon. Observe—

I. That the Divine call to duty is significant and unmistakable. "And Elijah cast his mantle upon him" (verse 19). Elisha at once understood the meaning of this act. It was a formal investiture with the prophetic office, and a sign of adoption as a son. This ceremony is considered by the Eastern people as an indispensable part of the consecration to the sacred office. It is in this way the Brahmins are still invested with the priestly character, a yellow mantle being thrown across their shoulders, which is buckled round the waist with a sacred ribbon: in this way, too, the Persian suffees are appointed. Elisha realized the solemnity and obligation of the call, and as soon as he recovered from his surprise, "he left the oxen and ran after Elijah." The Lord leaves his servants in no doubt as to the reality and meaning of their call to work for him. In some way or otherwise, sufficiently distinct and impressive, that call will be made known; it may be in a deep inward impression which no self-battling against can remove, it may be by significantly favourable providential events, or by the unanimous call of the church. The call is always so plain and unmistakable that it cannot be disobeyed without involving acute suffering; and what suffering is more constant and aggravated than to feel every day of a rapidly fleeting life—"I am in my wrong groove; I have missed my way"?

II. That the Divine call to duty is the occasion of much anxious thought "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother" (verse 20). Can it be wondered at if Elisha's heart still clung to home and kindred—a home where he had every comfort, and that in abundance, and where, perhaps, he was the only child of fond, loving parents? The prospect was not inviting. The untamed Jezebel still reigned; and every prophet of Jehovah would be exposed to her vindictive fury. Elijah had no luxuries to offer, for he had none himself; sustenance was at least sure, if the fare was coarse and simple; but to Elisha it was exchanging affluence for comparative poverty. Besides, there was the sense of personal unworthiness for so high and holy a calling, and this to a sensitive nature is the exciting cause of much mental anguish. It is a duty we owe to ourselves as well as to God to give to the Divine call the most pains-taking consideration. At such a time the destiny of an individual life is at stake; and who can say how many will be affected by the decision either way?

III. That the Divine call to duty demands an immediate and absolute response (verse 21). 1. *It is superior to the claims of the most lucrative worldly calling.* Elisha's occupation is an indication of his character. He is emphatically a man of peace. He lives in the rich Jordan vale, on green meadowland, where village festivals are held with dance and song. He passes the year in those rural occupations which are natural to the son of a wealthy yeoman, superintending the field-labourers himself, and, with the simplicity of primitive manners, taking a share in their toils. But all this he willingly surrenders. The most flattering worldly prospects may turn to bitter disappointment if we resist the Divine call on their behalf. 2. *It is superior to the claims of home and kindred.* It was at this point that Elisha seemed to show hesitation. This may account for Elisha's somewhat cold reply, "Go back again; for what have I done to thee?—*i.e.*, "Go, return to thy ploughing; why shouldst thou quit it? Why take leave of thy friends, and come with me? What have I done to thee to require such a sacrifice? for as a sacrifice thou evidently regardest it. Truly I have done nothing to thee. Thou canst remain as thou art" (vide *Speaker's Comm.*). But Elisha has meanwhile made up his mind to choose the better part. The exigencies of a Divine call supersede human duties and relationships (Luke ix. 61, 62). 3. *It is justly regarded as a distinguished honour.* No longer hesitating, Elisha returns a few steps to his oxen and labourers, indicates the complete relinquishment of his home and calling by the slaughter of two oxen and the burning of the instruments, makes a feast to his people to show his gratitude for his call and his sense of the honour done to him, and then, leaving father and mother, cattle and land, good position and comfortable home, attaches himself to the fortunes of the wandering Elijah. It is no small dignity put upon man when he is called to be a "co-worker with God." 4. *It brings man into association with the noblest spirits.* "Then he arose and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him" (verse 21). Elisha had heard of the startling exploits of the mountain-prophet, and it would be with feelings of reverence and awe that he found himself in such intimate fellowship with the fearless and august Tishbite. They were together as father and son, as is evident from the final address of Elisha to Elijah: "My father! my father!" (2 Kings ii. 12); and in the request for a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit (*ib.*, verse 9). God calls us into companionship with the loftiest and choicest spirits of the universe: these are ever in the vanguard of the holiest progress. Above all, we have the exalting and sublimating friendship of God Himself!

LESSONS:—1. *It is disastrous to embark in any sacred work without a consciousness of the Divine call.* 2. *Everything should be freely surrendered in obedience to the Divine call.* 3. *To persist in resisting the Divine call is to entail the bitterest remorse and suffering.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 19-21. The call of Elisha. Note—1. The variety of character among God's servants. 2. The honour God puts on the ordinary secular occupations of life. 3. The spirit of joyful self-sacrifice manifested at the call of duty.—*Macduff.*

Verse 19. The dignity of labour. 1. A blessing to man. 2. Not to be despised by any. 3. Sanctioned and approved by God.

— Though master of the ground and oxen and servants, yet he himself laid his hand to the plough. Idleness is no man's honour, nor is husbandry any man's disgrace. An honest calling in the world does not put us out of the way of our heavenly calling.

— Elisha is found, not in his study, but in the field; not with a book in his hand, but a plough. His father Shaphat was a rich farmer in Abelmeholah, himself was a good husbandman, trained up, not in the schools of the prophets, but in the thrifty trade of tillage; and behold this is the man whom God will pick out of all Israel for a prophet. God seeth not as man seeth; neither doth He choose men because they are fit, but therefore fits them because He hath chosen them. His call is above all earthly institution. I hear not aught that Elijah said; only he casts his cloak upon Elisha in the passage: that mantle, that act, was vocal. He finds a strange virtue in that robe; and, as if his heart was changed with that habit, forgets his team and runs after Elijah. The secret call of God offers an inward force to the heart, and insensibly draws us beyond the power of our resistance.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Another in his place would long before have come to the conclusion that he was too good for the plough; he was born for a higher sphere than that of a simple peasant; he was not at liberty to withhold his talents from mankind; he must study, and then enter upon the theatre of public action to help to enlighten and govern the world. Consider: the lights have the fairest and clearest lustre which know not that they shine; and those flowers of God scatter the sweetest perfume around them which, well contented with the little spot the Lord has appointed them, bloom hidden in silent dales. It does not follow from the calling of Elisha away from the plough to become a prophet, that every one without much gifts and without much knowledge can leave the plough, or any other ordinary occupation, and take up the prophet's calling. Men often think the Lord calls them to another, higher position, while it is only their vanity and the over-estimation of their gifts and powers which impel them. If God has called thee to anything, he will also open the way for thee, and furnish the means that are requisite thereto.—*Krummacher.*

Verses 20, 21. Grace is no enemy to good nature: well may the respects to our earthly parents stand with our duties to our Father in heaven. I do not see Elisha wring his hands and deplore his condition, that he should leave the world and follow a prophet; but for the joy of that change he makes a feast; those oxen, those utensils of husbandry, whereon his former labours had been bestowed, shall now be gladly devoted to the celebration of that happy day wherein he is honoured with so blessed an employment. If with desire, if with cheerfulness, we do not enter into the works of our Heavenly Master, they are not like to prosper in our hands. He is not worthy of this spiritual station who holds not the service of God his highest, his richest preferment.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Elisha in comparison with the three followers of Christ (Luke ix. 57, 62). 1. Although the son of rich parents and heir to a great possession, yet he forsakes and renounces all, for he considers it a greater gain to follow and serve the poor prophet. 2. He takes leave, indeed, of his parents, but

he does not put off the succession to a later time, until after their death; he does not disavow filial affection, but it does not keep him from entering upon his succession immediately. 3. He looks not backward after his call, but forward, and has no longing after that which he gives up; he follows on and serves with undivided heart in complete and joyful consecration. How deeply this Elisha shames many amongst us, to whom, however, not an Elijah, not a prophet, but the Lord of glory calls—Follow me!—*Lange*.

Verse 20. **A good home.** 1. A privilege to be improved. 2. An opportunity to prepare for public life. 3. A centre of peace, sympathy, and affection. 4. Never too good to be left at the call of duty.

Verse 21. **Obedience to the Divine call.** 1. Should be prompt: "He returned back from him." 2. Should be thorough and complete: "Took a yoke of oxen and slew them and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen." 3. Should be cheerful: "And gave unto the people, and they did eat." 4. Should be apparent: "Then he arose and went after Elijah."

— Self-sacrifice for God is here plainly inculcated. In the case of Elisha we read of no struggle between duty and convenience, between personal interest and obedience to the unmistakable will of heaven. There was compliance at once, hearty and unreserved; and of his surrender to Elijah it may be said, as of the disciples with reference to a higher master, he "left all and followed him." The example is lofty, and the invitation becomes us all. *We* are not asked to relinquish our homes, and our friends, and our substance to anything like the same extent; but if the sacrifice in our case be easier, it should be all the more willingly and cheerfully made. Why speak of unreasonable demands in relation to Him who gave what even He could never exceed in gift—"that whosoever believeth should not perish, but have everlasting life"?—*Howat*.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DEFEAT OF THE SYRIANS.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Benhadad—Son of the king of the same name mentioned (chap. xv. 20). Thirty and two kings with him—Vassals or viceroys who ruled single cities or districts (*comp.* Josh. xii. 7). With him—אִתּוֹ; not confederated as equals, but connected as dependent and tributary. Verse 4. According to thy saying, I am thine, &c.—Not an ironical taunt, "according to *thy* saying" it is so; for Ahab had not spirit enough to resent Benhadad's insolent domination: it was timorous submission. Verse 10. If the dust of Samaria shall suffice, &c.—Braggart menacing. Its purport is: Thou refusest me thy treasures, but with so great an army will I cover Samaria that, if every soldier wished to carry away a handful, its sand would not suffice. *Josephus* incorrectly interprets the words thus: "He could with his army cast up a dyke higher than his walls were, if every one of his people contributed only a handful of earth." Verse 11. Boast himself, &c.—Answered Benhadad with a good and apt proverb. The Latins say: *Ne triumphum canas ante victoriam*—the victory must be won before it is celebrated (*Keil*). Verse 14. The young men of the princes—The נַעֲרֵי *Thenius* interprets as "pages unaccustomed to fight;" *Ewald*, as "young lads of very tender age"—rather, the *armour bearers of the princes*, a small and unequal band (see verse 15). Order the battle?—Open it, or make attack. Verse 17. There are men come out—Scornful; not an army, not warriors, but only a few *men!* Benhadad ordered their capture, thinking it easy, and being content to drink on, contemptuous and self-indulgent. Verse 20. On an horse with the horsemen—*i.e.*, with horsemen surrounding him. Verse 22. At the return of the year—לִתְשׁוּבַת הַשָּׁנָה, with the beginning of the year—the spring—until which time the winter rains would prevent another campaign. Verse 24

Put captains in their rooms—Not mere military ornaments, but experienced warriors Benhadad now realises that he is engaged in no trifling conflict, to be airily undertaken and easily won. Verse 26. **Went up to Aphek**—In the valley of Jezreel, not far from Endor (1 Sam. xxix. 1), "the largest plain of Palestine, where, from the times of Joshua to Napoleon, so many great battles have been fought" (*Keil*). There is also an Aphek near Bethshemesh, on the mountains of Judah (Josh. xv. 53), where the Philistines lost the ark in battle (1 Sam. iv 1). Verse 30. **A wall fell upon 27,000**—Interpreters say, by miracle or earthquake; but most probably the fugitives crowded on to the old walls and attempted to make a stand against their pursuers, whereupon the walls gave way under the weight and pressure, burying the vast host in their ruins. Verse 33. **Men did diligently observe**—Took his words as a good omen. **Did hastily catch it**—Hastened to seize or quote the words, "my brother." Ahab found his vanity flattered by their abject suit, and, losing sense and wit, yielded to a sentimental magnanimity. Verse 34. **Make streets for thee**—חֻצוֹת means business thoroughfares. Verse 38. **Ashes upon his face**—Rather, *head bandage* for wounds (verse 37) Verse 42. **Thou hast let go a man**, &c.—It was a weakminded act, an injustice, a clear neglect of duty, and a dishonour to the God of Israel, whom the king of Israel represented Ahab knew Benhadad was Israel's enemy, and the fact that God had so signally defeated him showed Jehovah's anger towards him. Verse 43. **Heavy and displeased**—סַר וְזָעֵף, vexed and refractory, from סָרַר, to be stubborn (Deut. xxi. 18); more than gloomy and uneasy—fretful and resentful.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-21.

The Vice of Drunkenness.

A TIME came that tested the value of Baal as the guardian deity of Israel. The Syrian king invaded the country, attended by a gay retinue of regal courtiers and an immense army. Samaria was speedily invested, and threatened with complete destruction. There is no appeal to Baal now: he is impotent to help in time of trouble. Nor is the help of Jehovah sought in this extremity. Israel is at the mercy of the foe; and the godless, unbelieving Ahab, with cowardly supineness, surrenders himself to his fate. But the Lord has still a regard for His deluded people, and sends a prophet to assure them of deliverance. Formidable as the army of Benhadad appeared, there was an element of weakness in it which might readily bring about its defeat. The wine cup passed round freely, and the Syrian king and his military staff became intoxicated (verses 12-16). This paragraph, therefore, while recording the fact of supernatural interference on behalf of Israel, also illustrates the evils that may arise from the vice of drunkenness. Observe—

I. **That the vice of drunkenness inflates the mind with the most arrogant pretensions** (verses 1-9). Benhadad proudly demanded possession of all the treasures of Ahab and of his people—money, wives, and children—and threatened to search the palace and dwelling of the city for whatever was worth taking away. The insolence of this is almost beyond precedent. Such treatment is the worst that could be expected for a city taken by main force; and even an unscrupulous Eastern conqueror could hardly demand it of a garrison that had yielded without fighting. The whole conduct of Benhadad is another example of how the consciousness of irresistible power is apt to breed a spirit of arrogance, especially when under the influence of intemperance. "When drink's in, wit's out." The drunkard blusters and boasts what he has done, and what he will do; and though not backed by an immense force like that which surrounded Benhadad, he threatens terrible destruction to every opponent. But alas! it is only the froth of a pot-valiant swagger: when the fumes of the liquor are gone, so is the courage.

II. That the vice of drunkenness is closely associated with the vice of blasphemy (verse 10). Benhadad swore by his gods, as the blasphemous Jezebel had done by hers (chap. xix. 2). The meaning of Benhadad's oath has been differently understood. "In its general sense it is undoubtedly a boast that the number of Benhadad's troops is such as to make resistance vain and foolish. We may parallel it with the saying of the Trachinian at Thermopylæ, that the Persian arrows would darken the light of the sun. Probably the exact meaning is—When your town is reduced to ruins, as it will be if you resist, the entire heap will not suffice to furnish a handful of dust to each soldier of my army, so many are they. Thus there was a threat in the message as well as a boast" (*Speaker's Comm.*). Such blasphemous presumption does not go unpunished. Thus Julian, the apostate, going against the Persians, swore at his return to sacrifice the blood of the Christians. So the Constable of France vowed the destruction of Geneva: but God forbad it. The drunkard swears oaths of which he is ashamed in his sober moments. Intemperance and blasphemy are twin vices.

III. That the vice of drunkenness excites to deeds of recklessness (verse 12). The Syrian king was so enraged with the final message of Ahab, given in the terms of a proverb (verse 11), and which was the only evidence of anything like a courageous spirit shown by Ahab during the whole transaction, that he gave orders for the battle to begin forthwith, little dreaming what would be the result to his own army. A step taken in a moment of intemperate recklessness is difficult to recall, and may involve ruinous consequences.

IV. That the vice of drunkenness renders the inebriate unable to discern the hand of God in public events (verses 13-15). It seemed that Israel was doomed; in a few hours Samaria would be a heap of ruins, and Ahab and his treasures in the hands of the warlike Syrian. But a power was at work, unnoticed by the Syrians, too long despised by Ahab and ignored by his people. God interposed, once more sent His prophet to explain the method of rescue, and once more to call the apostate Ahab back to his allegiance. It was an evidence of the feeble condition of Samaria at the time when 7,000 people comprised all its inhabitants, and out of these was formed the little army that was to be led by the 230 young men of the princes. It was a paltry, insignificant force to oppose against the swarming host of the Syrians. But Jehovah was working His purpose through that tiny band of soldiers; and such was the blind infatuation of the intoxicated king that he saw it not. Drunkenness blears both the natural and the mental eye, and darkens and impairs the moral sense.

V. That the vice of drunkenness incapacitates at a critical moment (verses 16-18). The Syrians observe the sally of the young men from the city, and inform Benhadad; but such was his sovereign, almost sottish, indifference to any force that Samaria could send forth, that without troubling himself about the matter, he simply gave orders to take them alive. This was easier said than done. It was the crisis of the campaign, when the utmost vigilance and activity should have been shown; but the drunken king could not see it until it was too late. It is a great blunder to despise an enemy; and to be intoxicated gives the enemy a double advantage. "Drunkards are besotted and disabled; as a snuff of a candle in a socket drowned in the tallow yieldeth little or no light, but only a stench."

VI. That the vice of drunkenness subjects its victims to humiliating defeat (verses 19-21). The enemy that had been treated so contemptuously proved to be more powerful than was supposed. The 230 young men smote right and left, and laid prostrate all who opposed them; and the Syrians, seeing

the 7,000 coming out of the city to join in the fight, were seized with a sudden panic and fled, Benhadad escaping on horseback, leaving his army to be massacred by the victorious Israelites. So that it now might be said to Benhadad what Zebul once said to Gaal: Where is now thy mouth which just now boasted such great things? (verse 10) Is not this the people that thou hast despised? Go out, I pray now, and fight with them (Judges ix. 38). Any undertaking begun and carried on in drunkenness is sure to end in confusion and misery. Intemperate boasting is often the prelude of defeat. Wisely did the Romans say: "Sing not the triumphal song before the victory."

LESSONS:—1. *Drunkenness is a prolific source of national vice.* 2. *It is offensive to God and injurious to man.* 3. *It is certain to be severely punished.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-21. **The pride and insolence of power.**—I. Making extravagant demands (verses 1-6). II. Using blasphemous threats (verse 10). III. Provoking the weak to cautious and courageous opposition (verses 7-9, 11, 13-15). IV. Giving way to sensual indulgence (verses 12, 16). V. Contemptuously indifferent in moments of danger (verses 17, 18). VI. Brought to an ignominious downfall (verses 19-21).

— Who can look for other than war when he sees Ahab and Jezebel on the throne, Israel in the groves and temples of Baalim? The ambition of Benhadad was not so much guilty of this war as the idolatry of that wicked nation. How can they expect peace from earth who do wilfully fight against Heaven? Rather will the God of hosts arm the brute, the senseless creatures, against Israel, than He will suffer their defiance unavenged. Ahab and Benhadad are well matched: an idolatrous Israel with a paganish Idumean. Well may God plague each other who means vengeance to them both!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 2. The sacred historians study brevity so greatly, that their narrative is often, at the first look, abnormal and strange. But in view of this brevity, it is always lawful, as it is most reasonable, to supplement their narrative by supposing circumstances of small moment, which would remove the strangeness, to have happened, but not to have been recorded. Here the excessive demand of the Syrian king, coming close upon the first announcement of the siege, and placed at the very commencement of the negociations for peace, strikes us as something very unusual. But if we suppose a considerable time to have passed in the siege, and the city to be reduced to an extremity, and ambassadors to have been sent by Ahab to ask terms of peace short of absolute surrender, then we can quite understand that Benhadad might make such a demand in reply. He would expect and intend his demand to be rejected, since the voluntary surrender of his seraglio by an oriental monarch would be regarded as so disgraceful that no prince of any spirit could for a moment entertain the idea. The rejection of his demand would have left him free to plunder the town, which was evidently what he desired and purposed.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verses 1-4. In these two kings we see what a thing the human heart is, how insolent and timorous by turns (Jer. xvii. 9). It is insolent when man, grown prosperous, powerful, and rich, places his confidence in his success, and haughtily despises his neighbour. But it is timid when man falls into difficulty, and neither sees nor knows any help, just as was the despairing, womanly heart of king Ahab, who took it for granted that everything was lost when he saw the hosts of his enemies.—*Wurt. Summ.*

Verses 1-3. Benhadad thought that because he had the power to rob and appropriate, he also had the right to do so. But God gives power and might to kings, not to distort the right, but to protect it. The power of that one who, confiding in his own strength, treads the right under his feet, will sooner or later miserably decline.—*Lange.*

Verses 3, 4. Benhadad knows his own strength, and offers insolent conditions. It is a fearful thing to be in the mercy of an enemy: in case of hostility might will carve for itself. Ahab now, after the division of Judah, was but half a king: Benhadad had two-and-thirty kings to attend him. What equality was in this opposition? Ahab, therefore, as a reed in a tempest, stoops to the violent charge of so potent an enemy. It is not for the overpowered to capitulate; weakness may not argue, but yield. Tyranny is but drawn on by submission; and, where it finds fear and dejection, insulteth.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 4. Abject submission. 1. Unbecoming the dignity of a king. 2. A revelation of a cowardly spirit. 3. Subjects to increased insults and degradation.

— Those who no longer have a Lord in Heaven whom they fear, and before whom they bow, cringe and fawn before all men who can harm or serve them. If Ahab had said to the King of kings what he sent as a response to the royal robber and boaster: "I am Thine, and all that I have," he would then have had the trust and assurance: He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, &c. (Psa. xci. 1-3). He who bows before God is sure to be humble before men; but he does not cringe to them nor throw himself away. To submit to the superior power and force that demands gold and silver is no disgrace; but to surrender wife and child is contrary to honour, duty, and conscience.

Verses 5, 6. Haughty and insolent men grow all the more overbearing and ungovernable, and the more one submits to them, and crawls before them, and gratifies their desires, the more exorbitant they become in their demands. It is the curse that rests upon avarice, that the more the appetite after money and property is gratified, the more it grows, not diminishes (Prov. xvi. 8).—*Lange.*

Verses 7, 9. Overstrained subjection turns desperate. If conditions be imposed worse than death, there needs no long disputation of the remedy. The elders of Israel, whose share was proportional in this danger, hearten Ahab to a denial; which yet comes out so fearfully, as that it appears rather extorted by the peremptory indignation of the people, than proceeding out of any generosity of his spirit. Neither doth he say, I will not; but, I may not.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Ahab and his people. 1. *Ahab feels himself helpless and perplexed.* Adversity teaches us how to pray, but Ahab had turned from the living God, who is a helper in every time of trouble, to a dumb idol that cannot help. He had forgotten how to pray. He had sought to help himself by cowardly submission, and now he seeks help of men. In every distress we should turn first to the Lord (Psa. cxviii. 8, 9; cviii. 13). II. *The elders and the people reproach Ahab.* Instead of his giving instructions to them with the words of Joel iii. 15, like a king, they gave commands to him. He is no real king, realizing the position which has been given to him by God, whom the people control, instead of allowing themselves to be controlled by him. Tyrants are of this class. At first they do not consult the people, and do not scruple to appropriate their most sacred possessions, take away their faith, and burden their consciences. Ahab did not consult his people about the introduction of the worship of Baal and the persecution of the prophets; but now, when he does not know how to counsel or help himself, he applies to the wish of the nation—the aid of the people is now very acceptable.—*Lange*

Verses 10, 11. The proud Syrian, who would have taken it in foul scorn to be denied, though he had sent for all the heads of Israel, snuffs up the wind like the wild ass in the wilderness, and brags, and threats, and swears. O vain boaster! in whom I know not whether pride or folly be more eminent. Victory is to be achieved, not to be sworn; future events are no matter of an oath; thy gods, if they had been, might have been called as witnesses of thy intentions, not of that success whereof thou wouldst be the author without them. Thy gods can do nothing to thee, nothing for thee, nothing for themselves! All thine Aramites shall not carry away one corn of sand out of Israel, except it be upon the soles of their feet in their shameful flight; it is well if they can carry back those skins which they brought thither. There is no cause to fear that man that trusts in himself. Man may cast the dice of war, but the disposition of them is of the Lord.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 11. The Christian warrior. Very generally the young and inexperienced, when about to enter on any new enterprize, commence with feelings of more or less self-confidence. The young convert is often more confident than the old Christian, and thinks that he shall attain higher eminence in piety than others who are older in Christian experience. It is well to aim high, but we must not be too confident in our own strength, lest, like Peter, we suffer a grievous fall, or like others, sink down under great disappointment. In this verse we shall notice the contrast between the young Christian's anticipations, and the old Christian's experience.

I. The Christian soldier commencing his career.—1. *The oath of allegiance and servitude.* When a young man determines to enter the army, he accepts the bounty, is examined, sworn-in to serve his sovereign and country, clothed in regimentals, and joins the army for actual service. So, when God in His mercy converts a soul, He is drawn by the cords of love and the bands of a man. He feels his vast obligations; first gives himself up in solemn covenant to God, and then to His people. Then, in the Lord's house, in the presence of God, of angels, and men, takes the sacramental cup and swears allegiance to Christ. We know no act so solemn as this but the act of dying. It is a public dedication of the soul to God and to His service from henceforth. 2. *The service he enters upon.* As a soldier soon commences actual service to protect his country and defend its laws, so a soldier of Christ immediately enters on the Christian duties. He must oppose sin, fight against Satan, and withstand all the unhallowed influence of an ungodly world, and, as far as in him lies, promote the extension of the kingdom of Christ. The standard around which he is to rally is "The Cross," and he must die rather than strike his colours. His encouragement is that he shall come off more than a conqueror. 3. *The armour he wears.* Ancient soldiers wore armour (1 Sam. xvii. 5, 6, 54.) The Christian soldier has a complete suit from the armoury of God (Eph. vi. 13-15): "The girdle of truth," or Christian sincerity; "The breastplate of righteousness," being blest with imputed and imparted righteousness; "The shoes of the Gospel," having gospel truths as the foundation of his religion; "The shield of faith," an indispensable thing, for without confidence in Christ he would always fail; "The helmet of salvation," ever keeping his salvation in view and aiming after it; "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," which must be well handled both for offensive and defensive warfare, and always used with much prayer and with great determination and courage. 4. *The ardent feelings he evinces.* The soldier prepares himself with high expectations, and a determination not to desert his post or betray his cause. And so the young Christian soldier espouses the cause of Christ with ardent feelings, holy determination, and high anticipations of final success. He

knows that an almighty arm is on his side, that grace is promised, and final victory insured. He has much reason to rejoice, but none for self-confidence, for the conflict will often be severe; he will frequently be discouraged, and perhaps occasionally wounded, though not finally defeated. Let him not boast except in the Lord and in His strength. 5. *The manner in which he should conduct himself.* It should be with prayer, watchfulness, and perseverance (Eph. vi. 18). A Christian cannot feel too much his entire dependence upon God for all he needs. He is commanded to "watch and pray." Whatever be the strength of the foes, their mode of attack, the severity of the conflict, he must never lay down his arms; the decisive victory is often won when the conflict is most severe, and the soul most discouraged. Then it is that the power of the Great Captain is seen.

II. The Christian veteran at the close of his career.—1. *His retrospect.* As the old soldier loves to recount his past career, so the old Christian, on the bed of death, can look back on his past experience with adoring gratitude, as he thinks of the beginning of his Christian life, the enemies he has had to face, the hard battles he has been in, the wounds he has received, the victories he has won, the honours he has gained; but even then, and though about to put off his armour, he feels that he has nothing to boast of, but much to be thankful for. He has lower thoughts of himself than ever, and higher thoughts of Christ, feeling that all his failings were from himself, and that the praise of all his victories belongs to the captain of his salvation. 2. *His glorious end.* The putting off his armour, which is at death, not before. When he has by grace conquered the last enemy, then his warfare is accomplished, and his honourable career ended; then he exchanges the sword for the palm, the helmet for the crown, the armour for the victor's robe, and conflict for triumph. 3. *His eternal triumph.* No sooner is the last conflict over, and the victory won, than he enters heaven in triumph beyond all description or conception. What more could he wish for? He now thinks nothing of the warfare in the greatness of his joy.

LEARN:—1. *That if you would enjoy this glory you must become a soldier of Christ.* 2. *That if you would be victorious you must put on the whole Christian armour, and look to God for grace.* 3. *That in order to stimulate you in the conflict, you should think of the victory promised and the glory that follows.—Pulpit Sketches.*

Verses 13-15. Who can wonder enough at this unwearied mercy of God? After the fire and rain fetched miraculously from heaven, Ahab had promised much, performed nothing; yet again will God bless and solicit him with victory. One of those prophets whom he persecuted to death shall comfort his dejection with the news of his deliverance and triumph. Had this great work been wrought without premonition, either chance, or Baal, or the golden calves had carried away the thanks. Beforehand, therefore, shall Ahab know both the author and the means of his victory: God for the author; the two hundred and thirty young men of the princes for the means. What are these for the vanguard, and seven thousand Israelites for the main battle, against the troops of three and thirty kings, and as many centuries of Syrians as Israel had single soldiers? An equality of numbers had taken away the wonder of the event; but now the God of hosts will be confessed in this issue, not the valour of men. How indifferent is it with thee, O Lord, to save by many or by few, to destroy many or few! A world is no more to thee than a man; how easy is it for thee to enable us to be more than conquerors over principalities and powers!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 13. Formerly Ahab wished no instruction from the prophets; now, in his danger and distress, he admits them and listens to them. In days of

prosperity the world does not care for any advice from faithful servants of the Divine Word; it looks down upon them and despises them; but in the hour of sorrow and mourning it grants them access, and is glad to avail itself of their consolation. Before a great troop which has been abandoned of God, you have no cause to fear if God has said to you, I will help thee (Isa. xli. 13).—*Starke.*

Verse 16. Benhadad must have sorely repented his drunkenness, as it resulted in the loss of his army, his horses, and chariots. How often still is drunkenness the original cause of great sorrow and distress (Eph. v. 18; Isa. v. 22; Prov. xxiii. 29, 30)!

— There was nothing in Benhadad's pavilion but drink and surfeit and jollity, as if wine should make way for blood. Security is the certain usher of destruction. We never have so much cause to fear, as when we fear nothing. This handful of Israel dares look out, upon the prophet's assurance, to the vast host of Benhadad. It is enough for that proud pagan to sit still and command amongst his cups. O the vain and ignorant presumptions of wretched men, that will be reckoning without, against their Maker!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 18. Great men often think, when they have been disturbed in their carnal rest and security, that they only need to speak the word of command in order to be relieved from everything disagreeable and wearisome; but they must learn that they cannot rid themselves, by a command, of what God has sent for their humiliation.

Verses 19-21. The way of the godless shall perish (Psa. i. 6). Their way is covetousness and pillage (verses 3-6), haughtiness, insolence, and assurance (verses 10-18), service of their belly, wantonness (verse 16). This way shall perish; they are as chaff which the wind driveth away, utterly consumed with terrors (verses 20, 21; Psa. lxxiii. 19).—*Lange.*

— How easy is it for Him who made the heart to fill it with terror and consternation, even where no fear is! Those whom God hath destined to slaughter He will smite; neither needs He any other enemy or executioner than what He finds in their own bosom. We are not the master of our own courage or fears: both are put into us by that overruling power that created us. Stay now, oh stay! thou great king of Syria, and take with thee those forgotten handfuls of the dust of Israel. Thy gods will do so to thee, and more also, if thy followers return without their vowed burden! Learn now of the despised king of Israel, from henceforth, not to sound the triumph before the battle, not to boast thyself in the girding on of thine harness as in the putting off.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 22-30.

The Supreme Power of Jehovah Vindicated.

I. Against the flippant calumny of the heathen (verses 22, 23). The Syrian chiefs placed the God of Israel on the same level as their own heathen deities, and attributed their failure to the power of the Israelitish gods, who were gods of the hills. The local power and influence of deities was a fixed principle of the ancient polytheism. Each country was considered to have its own gods; and wars were regarded as being to a great extent struggles between the gods of the nations engaged in them. But not thus could the God of Israel be localised. His omnipresence, as well as his omnipotence, must be vindicated; and the slanders and misconceptions of the heathen answered in a way they could understand. It is one of the most mournful results of sin that it distorts the true idea of God; and there are those to-day who have even less noble ideas of His being and attributes than many of the ancient heathen. Jehovah is continually declaring His power and godhead—in His works, by His ministers, in the events of His Providence, in the story of redemption.

II. By means apparently disproportionate (verses 24-27). The Syrians were numerous—"filled the country": the Israelites were comparatively few—"like two little flocks of kids." The Syrians were well appointed: the Israelites but indifferently equipped. The Syrians chose their own battle-ground where their peculiar method of chariot warfare would have everything in its favour: the Israelites cautiously kept to the hills, and for six days harrassed the invaders as they marched along the plains, until on the seventh day the battle was joined, and it would seem to a spectator that the little band of Israelites would be instantly swallowed up by the Syrian hosts. But Jehovah is not confined to numbers, or to the best-considered human methods. He makes the weak things of the world confound the things that are mighty, to show that the excellency of the power is not of man, but of God.

III. By gaining a signal victory over the enemies of His people (verses 29, 30). Through the might of the Lord the Israelites were again victorious. They fell upon the Syrians, and slew great numbers of them. Seized with panic, the rest fled to Aphek, where a wall, probably cast down by an earthquake, crushed some thousands more in its fall. The vain boasting of the heathen was silenced; the Syrian host was scattered, and their king a fugitive and a suppliant. They had learnt that Jehovah was something more than the god of the hills. How terribly was their blasphemy rebuked! A day is approaching when all the detractors and enemies of God will be overthrown and punished, and the glory of His Name vindicated in the presence of an adoring universe.

IV. For the instruction of the nations (verse 28). The Lord has no delight in war, nor does He take pleasure in the death of the wicked; but He is jealous for His own honour. The Israelites do not deserve deliverance; but the Syrians have blasphemed Him by denying His attributes of omnipotence and omnipresence, and this sin of theirs must be punished. By destroying the Syrians Jehovah shows in the eyes of all the nations round that He is not the god of the hills only, but also of the valleys. It was similarly a denial of Jehovah's power which brought destruction on the host of Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 35). All the actions of God are full of significance, and are intended to reveal Himself more distinctly to the world. The more Jehovah vindicates His character, the higher the blessedness possible to man.

LESSONS:—1. *The presence of Jehovah is not confined to one locality.* 2. *Jehovah is specially jealous of His glory.* 3. *It is in great defeats that man discovers his own helplessness and the Almighty power of a righteous God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 22-30. The two victories over the Syrians were designed, according to the declaration of both the prophets who foretold them, to effect that thou (the king) and ye (the entire nation) may know that I am Jehovah—that is to say, that Jehovah is the only true God, the God of Israel. In this declaration we have specified the purpose of the entire narrative, and, at the same time, the standpoint from which it is comprehended. That day on Mount Carmel, if it did not put an end to idolatry at once, had at least broken its power, as was already evident from the mere fact that the prophets were no longer persecuted and put to death, but could again go about openly, and continue the work begun by Elijah. Still the conversion was by no means complete, but rather, being weak, it needed support and strength from above, if a complete relapse was to be prevented from setting in. This assistance came from a display of the power of

Jehovah, a power which rescued in a time of great need and distress. The attack of the Syrian king who had grown so mighty threatened Ahab and his kingdom with destruction. At this crisis God, who never forsakes His people, repeatedly grants them the victory, which was so extraordinary and wonderful that it could not possibly be ascribed to human power and strength, but only to God, to His might, His grace and truth. We have thus, in this account, not merely an ordinary history of wars, but a part of the divine history of salvation before us. Although the first victory is a marked evidence of the saving might and grace of Jehovah, the second, by which the entire Syrian power was destroyed, was for Israel, as well as for the Syrians themselves, a still more remarkable proof of the fact that Jehovah was no mere mountain and local or national divinity, but that the whole earth was His, and He was God of all nations (Ex. xix. 5; Psa. xxiv. 1). He who reduces the God of Israel to a mere local or national deity, as is so often done even now-a-days, stands on the same footing with the servants of the king of Syria (verses 23, 28).—*Lange.*

Verses 22-25. The invariable symptoms of warlike policy. I. Restless vigilance and expensive preparations (verse 22). II. A facility in finding reasons for recent defeat (23, 24). III. A thirsting for revenge (verse 25).

Verse 22. God purposeth the deliverance of Israel, yet may not they neglect their fortifications; the merciful intentions of God towards them may not make them careless; the industry and courage of the Israelites fall within the decree of their victory. Security is the bane of good success. It is no contemning of a foiled enemy; the shame of a former disgrace and miscarriage whets his valour and sharpens it to revenge. No power is so dreadful as that which is recollected from an overthrow.—*Bp. Hall.*

— The advice of the prophet, Go, strengthen thyself, &c., is applicable in another and higher sense to us all. Our enemies are not idle, they are constantly returning to the attack. Even if we have by the help of the Lord obtained a victory over sin, the world, and the devil, that is not all there is to be done; we must, even after the victory, be on our guard and arm ourselves, so that the enemy may not fall on us unawares (1 Cor. xvi. 13; Eph. vi. 10; 1 Peter v. 8).

Verses 23-25. The evil counsellors of Benhadad. I. They urge him on to war and battle instead of counselling peace, because their pride was wounded, and their hope of booty had been frustrated. Place no confidence in the man who incites you to begin a quarrel. II. They plead religious reasons, and make use of the superstition of their unwitting lord. It is possible for a bad unholy thing to become confirmed through superstition; the man who plants himself on truth, however, will not permit himself to be deceived on such a foundation. III. They shove the blame of the ignominious defeat on to the thirty-two kings, instead of seeking for it in themselves. A man always prefers to find the cause of his own misfortune and distress in another's rather than in his own sin and guilt. —*Lange.*

Verse 23. What doltish conceits doth blind paganism frame to itself of a godhead! As they have many gods, so finite: every region, every hill, every dale, every stream hath their several gods; and each so knows his own bounds, that he dares not offer to encroach upon the other; or, if he do, buys it with loss. Who would think that so gross blockishness should find harbour in a reasonable soul? A man doth not alter with his station: he that wrestled strongly upon the hill, loseth not his force in the plain; all places find him alike active, alike valorous. Yet these barbarous Aramites shame not to imagine that of God which they would blush to affirm of their own champions. Superstition

infatuates the heart out of measure; neither is there any fancy so absurd or monstrous, which incredulous infidelity is not ready to entertain with applause.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 26. Benhadad followed their foolish and perverse advice, because it was entirely in accordance with his own wish. So strong and overpowering is sinful desire in the human heart, that even the bitterest dispensation and chastisement of God suppresses it only for a time, and, as soon as the external impression ceases, it breaks forth afresh.

Verse 27. **The conditions of victory.** I. Are not always decided by numbers. II. Are in the hands of God. III. It is vain for the most powerful armies to fight against the Divine purpose. IV. Valuable lessons are gained by defeat.

Verse 28. **The declaration of the Divine Majesty.** I. Is made by competent messengers. II. Seen in the overthrow of blasphemous detractors. III. Is intended to teach and reassure the people of God.

Verse 29. Nothing among mortal affairs is so inconstant as temporal prosperity. There is a time for everything. For that reason let no man place his dependence on his good fortune, and exalt himself on its account, for he does not know whether he shall possess in the evening what was his in the morning.—*Wurt. Summ.*

Verse 30. We may suppose a terrific earthquake during the siege of the place, while the Syrians were manning the defence in full force, which threw down the wall where they were most thickly crowded upon it, and buried them in its ruins. The great earthquake at Lisbon in 1755 is said to have destroyed 60,000 persons in a little more than five minutes.—*Speaker's Comm.*

— "Benhadad fled into an inner chamber." Glad to hide himself in any hole. So Manasseh, that faced the heavens in his prosperity, in trouble basely hides his head among the bushes (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12). Gidlimer overcome by Bellisarius and besieged, sent to beg of him three things: 1. A piece of bread to ease his hunger; 2. A sponge to dry his eyes; 3. A harp to cheer up his heart, well-nigh broke with grief.—*Trapp.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 31-43.

The Remorse of Neglected Opportunities.

Life is but brief, yet it is full of great opportunities for usefulness. Those opportunities correspond to our position, our means, and our abilities. God expects from no man what He has not given him power to do. He who is wise to see and prompt to act when the opportunity is presented will win success and honour. Not to do the plainly revealed duty of the moment is to entail weakness, disappointment, and suffering. We shall be punished for the good we neglect, as well as for the evil that we do.

I. That opportunities occur when we are called to do a great work for God. 1. *Every opportunity brings with it corresponding responsibility* (verses 31, 32). Victory, a victory achieved by direct Divine interference, had placed Benhadad—the enemy of God and of Israel—in the power of Ahab. It was an opportunity not to be thrown away. The Lord had appointed this man to "utter destruction" (verse 42), and Ahab knew it. Benhadad was to be taught to know, in avenging justice, the greatness of that God he had blasphemed; and the power of the state he ruled was to be so broken as to render

it incapable of giving further trouble to Israel. The purpose of God and the safety of Israel were placed in the hands of Ahab; the enemy might now be punished, and his power for ever crushed. Ahab neglected the opportunity, and he lived long enough to see and regret it. It is a grave, solemn moment when we are brought into the presence of an acknowledged evil which we have power to destroy. We have need to pray for courage and fidelity to act wisely and decisively. 2. *We are not justified in indulging private sentiment at the sacrifice of public duty* (verses 33, 34). It was here that Ahab failed. What at first sight might seem an act of magnanimity becomes, when rightly viewed, a gross weakness; and the generosity which might entitle a man to praise if shown towards a private enemy, may become a crime in a king towards a public adversary. What would have been thought of the Regent of England, after the victory of Waterloo, if, when Napoleon, the great troubler of Europe, was brought a prisoner to our shores, he had been set free? The sense of duty was weakened in Ahab by his past disobedience and by his unlawful sympathy with idolatry. The neglect of one duty incapacitates the soul for doing another; and so when a great emergency comes upon us, we find ourselves unequal to its demands. The king must lose sight of selfish ends and feeling in a righteous anxiety to promote the public good.

II. That a time will come when we shall be made painfully conscious of opportunities neglected. 1. *This may be done through the sufferings of others* (verses 35-38). A son of the prophets submitted to be wounded that he might the more effectively bring home to Ahab his sin. The faithful teacher must not shrink from suffering. It is rarely we can be faithful to others without pain to ourselves. The most powerful method of preaching the truth is learned in the school of trial. 2. *Will be done in a way not to be mistaken* (verses 39-42). (1). It was symbolic. This is the first example of those symbolical actions of the prophets which occur so often in the subsequent history of Israel and Judah. The man who refused to smite the son of the prophet became a representative of Ahab in his refusal to obey the word of the Lord. The prophets mentioned in verses 13, 22, and 28 had said enough to show Ahab that when his royal enemy fell into his power he must not covenant with him, but smite and utterly destroy him. But his making a covenant with him and sending him away (verse 34) was a refusal to smite him. (2). It was faithful and pointed (verse 42). Here Ahab, like David on another occasion (2 Sam. xii. 5, 6), pronounces his own condemnation. As the son of the prophet was to answer by his life for letting his supposed prisoner free, so Ahab is to answer with his life for granting liberty to the doomed Syrian monarch. The sin of neglect will sooner or later be brought home to every bosom, and the guilt will be self-acknowledged.

III. That the consciousness of neglected opportunities will fill the soul with bitter remorse (verse 43). The slumbering conscience of the weak, easy-going Ahab was once more awoke, and he went to his home depressed and angry—angry with himself, and angry with the means which had been intended to bring him to repentance and disobedience. He felt the burden of a sense of Divine wrath upon him, and, instead of humbling himself and seeking for mercy, he became sulky and soured. He was still refractory and rebellious; and yet he could not shake off the gloomy, stinging remorse of neglected opportunities. His experience is a picture of the tortures which will for ever afflict the impenitent: for ever conscious of oft-repeated sin, and for ever incapable of ridding himself of its consequences!

LESSONS:—1. *Every soul will be judged according to its opportunities in life.* 2. *Opportunities for well-doing are offered to all.* 3. *To neglect opportunities for good is to condemn ourselves.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 31-43. When authority is compassionate out of the proper season, and neglects its office of correction, it draws upon itself the guilt of the other. God wants no mercy to be shown where He has ordered punishment.—*Cramer.*

Verses 31-33. Praise, flattery, and subserviency are only too often the snare with which kings and great men are caught, so that under the appearance of generosity and magnanimity they may be led astray and act contrary to the will of God. They ought, indeed, to be merciful and gracious, but not forget that to do justice is their first duty, and that they do not carry the sword in vain. Ahab persecutes an Elijah in every kingdom, and threatens him with death; but he permits a robber and a plunderer to sit beside him in his chariot, and makes a covenant with him. What in the eyes of the world looks like generosity, in the eyes of God, who trieth the heart and reins, is only weakness and folly. Great injury can be done by seeming ill-timed generosity.—*Lange.*

Verse 31. There can be no more powerful attractive of humble submission than the intimation and conceit of mercy. We do at once fear and hate the inexorable. This is it, O Lord, that allures us to thy throne of grace, the knowledge of the grace of that throne; with thee is mercy and plenteous redemption; thine hand is open before our mouths, before our hearts. If we did not see thee smile upon suitors, we durst not press to thy footstool. Behold now we know that the king of heaven, the God of Israel, is a merciful God; let us put sackcloth upon our loins and strew ashes upon our heads, and go meet the Lord God of Israel, that He may save our souls.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 32 compared with verse 10. Contrasts in the same individual life. 1. The king—the slave. 2. The proud boaster—the craven suppliant. 3. The confident leader of a great army—the defeated and dejected fugitive.

Verse 32. How well doth this habit become insolent and blasphemous Benhadad and his followers! a rope and sackcloth! a rope for a crown, sackcloth for a robe! He that was erewhile a lord and king, is now a servant; and he that was servant to the king of Syria, is now his lord. He that would blow away all Israel in dust, is now glad to beg for his own life at the door of a despised enemy. No courage is so haughty which the God of hosts cannot easily bring under. What are men or devils in those Almighty hands?—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 34. **Complicity with idolatry.** 1. Unfits for the proper discharge of kingly duties. 2. Encourages a false leniency towards the greatest enemy. 3. Blinds the mind to true conceptions of public justice. 4. Sows the seeds of future troubles.

— Ahab, without "inquiring of the Lord," who had given him so great a victory (verse 28), whether he should let Benhadad go or no, at once agrees to the terms offered; and, without even taking any security for their due observance, allows the Syrian monarch to depart and return to his own country. Considered politically, the act was one of culpable carelessness and imprudence. It let loose an enemy whose talent, ambition, and personal influence made him peculiarly formidable; and it provided no effectual security against the continuance of his aggressions. Benhadad might, or might not, regard himself as bound by the terms of a covenant made when he was a prisoner. If he took the view that he was not bound—as his after conduct shows that he did (xxii. verse 3)—Ahab left himself no means of enforcing the obligations incurred except by a renewal of hostilities. And if Ahab's conduct was thus, politically speaking, wrong in him as the mere human head of a state, much more was it unjustifiable in one who

held his crown under a theocracy. "Inquiry at the word of the Lord" was still possible in Israel (1 Kings xxii, verses 5, 8), and would seem to have been the course that ordinary gratitude might have suggested.—*Speaker's Comm.*

— This as impolitic as untheocratic proceeding of Ahab arose by no means from a "heart naturally very good," but from weakness, indecision, and self-deluding vanity. To free a cruel and faithless enemy was not only great harshness towards his own subjects, but also an obvious striving against God, who, by granting the promised victory, had given the enemy of His people into His hand. Even though Ahab had no express command, as Saul had regarding Agag (1 Sam. xv. 3), yet there lay upon him, if as theocratic ruler he would respect the will of the Lord, inasmuch as the Lord had given him into his hands as a despiser of His Divine Majesty, the sacred duty of securing rest for himself and his subjects by his death; as it was natural to presume that the faithless adversary, after his freedom was recovered, would not adhere to a treaty formed on compulsion, which accordingly happened (xxi. 1). The punishment of his striving against God is immediately announced to Ahab.—*Keil.*

Verses 35-37. He who has his calling and service from the Word of God ought to allow no danger to detain him from making an announcement of the fact (2 Tim. iv. 2), and must obediently submit himself to His commands, even when the fulfilment of them is joined with pain and sacrifice.

Verses 35, 36. Disobedience. 1. Is aggravated as committed against the revealed will of God. 2. Is not excused from a reluctance to inflict pain. 3. Is faithfully denounced. 4. Is inevitably punished.

Verse 35. "Smite me, I pray thee." 1. That hereby I may show Ahab how he hath wounded his own soul by sparing Benhadad. 2. What a wound both he and his people shall hereafter receive hereby. 3. That I may seem a wounded soldier, and so may have the easier access to Ahab.—*Trapp.*

Verse 36. It is not for us to examine the charges of the Almighty: be they never so harsh or improbable, if they be once known for His, there is no way but obedience or death. Not to smite a prophet when God commands, is no less sin than to smite a prophet when God forbids. It is the divine precept or prohibition that either makes or aggravates an evil; and if the Israelite be thus revenged that smote not a prophet, what shall become of Ahab that smote not Benhadad!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 40. Lost opportunities. I. *Important interests have been committed to our care.* 1. Our personal salvation. 2. The salvation of our neighbours. 3. The religious education of our children. 4. Sympathy and relief for the poor and suffering. II. *God furnishes an opportunity to all.* 1. He fits the opportunity to the work required. 2. He provides the means essential to success. 3. He gives efficiency and certainty to the effort. III. *Opportunities lost are lost for ever.* 1. We lose them unconsciously. 2. We lose them while busied here and there with minor things. 3. Lost opportunities bring loss of happiness. 4. The consequences of their loss will be eternal.—*Wythe.*

— The danger of much worldly business. Consider—1. *The extreme brevity of seasons of spiritual advantage.* Shortness of life—illustrate by metaphors of Scripture. Life as the commencement of eternity, everything; in competition with eternity, nothing. Danger of procrastination. Importance of every opportunity of spiritual instruction. II. *The difficulties and dangers against which we have to guard, if we would not sacrifice them.* 1. The absorbing character of worldly business. 2. Liable to

neglect chief ends of existence for inferior pursuits. 3. Much devotedness to the world disqualifies for spiritual services. 4. Positive losses of religious privilege accrue from multitude of engagements. III. *The appalling losses we may sustain through a solitary act of negligence.* Great business of Satan is to draw off men from the care of the soul. One act of indiscretion may, in the things of this life, involve years of repentance; but one neglect of the soul may be the cause of its everlasting ruin. "Oh, that thou hadst known at least in this *thy day*," &c.

LESSONS.—1. *Cultivate a spirit of contrition over past indifference.* 2. *Use all diligence to make your calling and election sure.—The Preacher's Portfolio.*

Verses 42, 43. Ahab listened well pleased to the falsehood from the lips of the Syrian nobles, for it gave nourishment to his folly; the truth from the mouth of the prophet made him restless and angry, because it punished his folly. There is no help for the man who allows himself to be irritated by the truth instead of receiving it with meekness (Jas. i. 21). There is nothing that so rouses and provokes an unconverted and unbelieving man as to have his sinful character so unveiled and set before his eyes that he can no longer justify or excuse himself.—*Lange.*

Verse 42. The equity of punishment. 1. The Divine order. 2. Is regulated by opportunities granted. 3. Is afflicted according to nature and degree of sin.

Verse 43. "Heavy and displeased." Not with a "sorrow according to God," but such as arose from a slavish fear. This heavy message in the midst of his triumph being worse than the whip and bell hung up usually in the chariot of the Roman triumpher, to show him what he might one day come to—namely, to be whipped as a slave, yea, to lose his head as an offender.—*Trapp.*

CHAPTER XXI.

AHAB AND THE VINEYARD OF NABOTH.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Naboth the Jezreelite—*Naboth'* נָבוֹת *fruits*, according to Gesenius; but *pre-eminence*, according to Fürst. He was an Israelite resident in the town of Jezreel (the *Alex. Sept.* follows the Hebrew, and designates him an *Israelite* throughout the whole chapter) owning a plot of ground (2 Kings ix. 25, 26) situate on the eastern slope of the hill of Jezreel, as well, also, as the vineyard, whose location is uncertain. Vineyard in Jezreel—a town in the tribe of Issachar (Josh. xix. 18), where the kings of Israel had a palace (1 Kings xviii. 45). Hard by the palace of Ahab—The *Sept.* reads instead, "hard by the threshing floor of Ahab, king of Samaria." The dispute as to location of the vineyard turns upon the question whether "the palace" here referred to was the king's residence at Jezreel or at Samaria. Note, however, that the words in verse 4—*Ahab came into his house*, &c.—are identical with those in chap. xx. 43, where the further explanation points to *Samaria* as his home. Further, in verse 8, we find that Jezebel sends her letters to Jezreel, as if she were resident in some other place; and that the elders of Jezreel send her tidings (verse 14) of Naboth's death, which would certainly have been superfluous if she were at the time resident in Jezreel. So probably the vineyard was *hard by the palace in Samaria*, and the king came to Naboth at Jezreel to ask this possession of its owner. Verse 3. Naboth said, the Lord forbid it me—*Lit.*, Be it to me far *from Jehovah* (לִי מֵיְהוָה) *that I*, &c., indicating both the personal loyalty of his faith in Jehovah, and his religious purpose not to sell *God's* heritage to an idolatrous king. Verse 5. Why is thy spirit sad?—See for סָרָה note on chap. xx. 43—*resentful.* Verse 7. Dost thou now govern Israel?—Either an ironical taunt,

or a rallying call; for the words are usually translated imperatively: "Thou! exert thy royal sway over Israel!" Verse 8. She wrote letters—This is the solitary instance recorded in the Bible of a woman being able to write. Female education in the East then, as now, rendered it extremely exceptional for a woman to possess such a qualification. Sent the letters (*lit.* the letter) unto the elders and nobles that, in his city, dwelt with Naboth—a statement which affirms both that Jezreel was the native city of Naboth, and his usual abode. These elders and nobles were his fellow-townsmen. Verse 9. Proclaim a fast—An observance only proper on occasions of great distress and national calamities (Judges xx. 26; 1 Sam. vii. 6 Joel i. 14; ii. 12). This would impart an appearance of gravity to the frivolous but foul procedure. Verse 10. Thou didst blaspheme God and the king—בֵּרַכְתָּ אֱלֹהִים וְמֶלֶךְ. The word בֵּרַךְ means to *bless, reverence, adore.* "Thou hast blessed Elohim [not using the name JEHOVAH] and the king." Keil accepts the words as meaning, Thou hast blessed—*i. e., bid farewell to,* taken thy leave of God and the king; because at departure one utters a benediction [*cf.* Deut. xiii. 11; Lev. xxiv. 14 *sq.*; and 2 Sam. xvi. 9]. Verse 11. Did as Jezebel had sent unto them—Shows their absolute moral degradation and slavish submission before the tyranny of this woman. Verse 15. Arise, take possession . . . for Naboth is not alive, but dead—His possessions became confiscated, falling into the king's hands (*cf.* 2 Sam. xvi. 4; Deut. xiii. 16). Verse 16. Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard—From Samaria to Jezreel. Verse 19. Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?—Crime traced back to the true criminal, for he, even more than Jezebel, actuated the deed. God is "swift to mark iniquity." See Note on chap. xxii. 38. Verse 20. Hast thou found me?—The *Vulgate* errs, and Luther is thereby misled. "Hast thou ever found me thine enemy?" הַמְצָאתַנִי, from מָצָא, *to come at, overtake, acquire, arrest, seize.* Verse 21. Will take away thy posterity—*Lit.* "Extinguish thee before me." Verse 29. Seest thou how Ahab humbleth, &c.—Even the external sign of Ahab's repentance God regards as occasion for reprieve, though Ahab was so notable and manifold a criminal (verses 25, 26) He is "slow to anger and of great mercy." But the sentence would come upon his son, Jehoram, who, met by Jehu, was mortally wounded, and the house of Ahab thus ceased. Elijah's prophecy of Ahab's despicable death was literally fulfilled, as the following chapter shows.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-16.

THE OVERMASTERING POWER OF A COVETOUS SPIRIT.

I. That a covetous spirit is unsatisfied with the most ample possessions (verses 1-3). About twenty-five miles from Samaria Ahab had his summer palace, his vast park and favourite hunting seat at Jezreel—the Windsor of England, and Fontainebleau of France. After his successful wars with Syria, he gives himself to luxury and pleasure, and employs himself in enlarging and beautifying his summer residence. Not content with what he already possesses, he covets what belongs to his subjects, as the people who demanded a king were forewarned would be the case (1 Sam. viii. 14). More particularly is he anxious to possess a vineyard owned by one Naboth, of an illustrious family, and to add it to the royal demesnes. But Naboth refuses to part with his property, and confirms his refusal in the name of Jehovah. It is the curse of covetousness to be never satisfied. As a ship may be overladen with gold and silver even unto sinking, and yet have compass and sides enough to hold ten times more, so covetous men, though they have enough to sink them, yet have they never enough to satisfy them. "This kyte-footed corruption, wherever it domineers, blasts and banishes all nobleness of spirit, natural affection, humanity, reason, discretion, manliness, mutual entertainment, intercourse of kindness and love; so that, for any fair dealing, a man had as good converse with a cannibal as with a truly covetous caitiff."

II. That a covetous spirit gives way to unmanly and helpless distress when it cannot have all it wishes (verse 4). Like a spoilt child, because he cannot have his toy, Ahab punishes himself by yielding to a fit of fretfulness and sour temper that completely prostrated him. Avarice, like every other evil passion, leads to moral pauperism. "Had covetous men, as the fable goes of Briareus, each of them one hundred hands," writes Dryden, "they would all of them be employed in grasping and gathering, and hardly one of them in giving or laying out; a thing in itself so monstrous that no thing in nature besides it is like it, except it be death and the grave, the only things I know which are always carrying off the spoils of the world, and never making restitution." Covetousness has been well called "the great sepulchre of all other passions." The covetous monarch, surrounded with the luxuries and wealth of a kingdom, blubbers and frets because he does not own a paltry herb garden.

> "Some, o'er enamoured of their bags, run mad,
> Groan under gold, yet weep for want of bread."
>
> *Young.*

III. That a covetous spirit is utterly unscrupulous as to the means by which its wishes are gratified (verses 5-14). 1. *It is at the mercy of the vilest agents.* Jezebel knew how to take advantage of the weak moments of her weak husband, and, unhappily, had at her beck the agents who were ready to carry out any diabolical plot she might invent. "Big and black though the villany appear, the wicked queen resolved that Naboth should be executed for treason, and then his property, with the coveted vineyard included, would all revert to the crown as a criminal's possessions. While her poor fool of a husband, therefore, is sleeping off his wounded pride, she, never accustomed to stand upon trifles, commits the fourfold crimes of forgery, false-witness, perjury, and murder. We are shocked when we read of the massacre of Glencoe in the very midst of the open-handed hospitality of the children of the mountains. Our whole soul shudders at the story of that Russian soldier who, during the Crimean war, solicited in his dying agonies a cup of cold water from an English officer, and then pointed his pistol right at his benefactor's heart. And with kindred feelings we read of the horrible contradiction before us—an unoffending follower of God compelled to surrender his life, a victim to the machinations of a heathen queen, screening, but only in reality aggravating, her wickedness under the thin disguise of a new-born religious zeal." 2. *It weakly sanctions deeds it has not itself the courage to do or prevent.* Ahab must have known about the execution and its alleged cause; and he knew Jezebel well enough to know that she would not hesitate at any means by which her ends could be gained. Naboth stood between him and his avaricious purpose; and he cared not how the obstacle was removed. The sufferings of Naboth and his sons, who perished with their father (2 Kings ix. 26), caused the king no uneasiness. A covetous spirit is essentially mean, cowardly, heartless.

IV. That a covetous spirit eagerly clutches its prize, little caring how it has been acquired, and little dreaming what a curse it may bring (verses 15, 16). Without wasting a pang of regret upon the cruel fate of his harmless victims, Ahab drives with all speed to Jezreel, and jauntily enters into possession of the confiscated estate. "He walks round and round; he admires trellis and cluster, and branches hanging over the wall. He plans improvement here and enlargement there, by way of preparing for the flower-garden he has in view. And now he turns to leave, when, just at the very moment, let us indulge the fancy, he is plucking a bunch of the dead man's grapes as a gift for Jezebel, there confronts him—like an apparition from the other world, like the ghost of Naboth, like Banquo in another scene—one he has not seen for more than seven years, never since they parted that night of the rushing storm

at the gate of Jezreel—one he had thought Jezebel had either effectually frightened, or who had gone back to his mountains, or down to his grave; and yet there he is! still with the long shaggy locks, the sheep-skin mantle, the dark knitted brows, and the thunder peal about to issue from those awful lips." (*Howat.*) It is ELIJAH! and from his mouth the trembling Ahab receives his doom—the overthrow and ruin of his house. A covetous man may gain his unholy ends, but he gains also disappointment, misery, remorse. What is wealth, when peace of mind and the hope of the heavenly inheritance are gone?

LESSONS:—1. *The demands of covetousness are insatiable.* 2. *A covetous spirit is easily tempted to commit the worst crimes.* 3. *Covetousness prepares the instrument of its own torment.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-16. Naboth's vineyard. In this narrative we have an exhibition of the following topics:—I. *Covetousness.* Ahab saw Naboth's garden; its situation, and in all likelihood its condition, made it desirable in his eyes. He offered Naboth a price for it which he declined, because it was unlawful and dishonourable to sell it. This ought to have satisfied Ahab, but it did not; he was annoyed and vexed at being refused, and willingly allowed his unscrupulous wife to resort to any means to secure for him his coveted prize. How many are led away by covetousness; resorting to illegal means to gain the object of their desire. David conceived an inordinate desire for Uriah's wife, and planned the death of her husband that his desire might be gratified. II. *Manly independence.* Naboth said to Ahab: "The Lord forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my father unto thee." It was a great temptation to Naboth to yield to the expressed wish of the king; he might gain favour, and be remembered by the king in many ways to his temporal advantage. Many yield to temptations of this kind; they will do almost anything to gain the favour or the kindly notice of the wealthy or the influential in society. But Naboth was no sneak. He would not satisfy right to the pleasure even of the king, and told him so. It is well for men to cultivate kindliness and obliging manners, but not at the expense of their own self-respect and manly independence. III. *Despotism.* As soon as Jezebel made the proposal to murder Naboth, it was readily executed. It does not appear as if there was any protest against it, either on the ground of illegality or unrighteousness. There was no fear of any legal consequences. The will of the queen was supreme, and there would be no desire to resist it. Such deeds as the murder of Naboth fill the annals of despotism. IV. *Divine retribution.* The death of Naboth was duly announced to Ahab, and he arose to go to take possession of the coveted vineyard. He little thought that the whole proceedings were watched by another King—that the blood of Naboth had ascended into the ears of the Lord of Hosts, crying for vengeance. He thought not of these things; but God marked his sin, and sent Elijah to charge him with it, and to declare unto him God's vengeance. Even so the sinner may indulge in his sinful course, never thinking that there is an all-seeing eye resting upon him.—*The Study and Pulpit.*

—Voices from Naboth's vineyard I. *One of these is—Beware of covetousness.* That vineyard has its counterpart in the case and conduct of many still. Covetousness may assume a thousand chameleon hues and phases, but these all resolve themselves into a sinful craving after something other than what we have. Covetousness of means: a grasping after material wealth, the race for riches. Covetousness of place: aspiring after other positions in life than those which Providence has assigned

to us, not because they are better, but because they are other than our God-appointed lot, invested with an imaginary superiority. And the singular and sad thing is, that such inordinate longings are most frequently manifested, as with Ahab, in the case of those who have least cause to indulge them. How many there are surrounded with all possible affluence and comfort, who put a life thorn in their side by some similar chase after a denied good, some similar fretting about a denied trifle. Be assured that carping discontent will grow, if you feed it, till it comes to eat out the kernel of life's happiness; a discontented manhood or womanhood culminating in that saddest of conditions, a peevish old age. II. Another of the voices is, *Keep out of the way of temptation.* If Ahab, knowing his weakness and besetting sin, had put a restraint upon his covetous eye, and not allowed it to stray upon his neighbour's forbidden property, it would have saved a black page in his history, and the responsibility of a heinous crime. If Achan had not cast his eye on the goodly Babylonish garment, the shekels of silver and the wedge of gold, he would have saved Israel a bloody discomfiture and himself a fearful end. Each has his own strong temptation—his besetting sin. That sin should be specially watched, muzzled, curbed; that gate of temptation specially padlocked and sentinelled. III. Another voice is, *Be sure your sin will find you out.* Ahab and Jezebel, as we have seen, had managed to a wish their accursed plot. The wheels of crime had moved softly along without one rut or impediment in the way. The two murderers paced their blood-stained inheritance without fear of challenge or discovery. Their time for retribution *did* come at last, although years of gracious forbearance were suffered to intervene. And are the principles of God's moral government different now?—*Macduff.*

Verses 1-4. **An undisciplined nature.** I. Fancies it may gain possession of whatever it covets. II. Cannot understand the motives of those who refuse to gratify its desires. III. Easily overwhelmed with disappointment and chagrin.

Verse 1. **Naboth had a fair vineyard**; it had been better for him to have had none: his vineyard yielded him the bitter grapes of death. Why do we call those goods, which are many times the bane of the owner? Naboth's vineyard lay near to the court of Jezebel: it had been better for him had it been planted in the wilderness. It was now the perpetual object of an evil eye, and stirred those desires which could neither be well desired, nor satisfied: eminency is still joined with peril, obscurity with peace. There can be no worse annoyance to an inheritance, than the greatness of an evil neighbour.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 2. Great lords often have fancies which cost them more time and money than do their chief and holiest duties. Thus Ahab thought more of the enlargement and adornment of his garden than of the good of his subjects. The desire for things which serve for pleasure is often a temptation to grievous sin. Therefore says the Scripture: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods, nor anything that is his." Let the needy be thy first care, not thine own pleasure. It is a great gain to be godly and contented. Watch over thine heart, for desires apparently lawful, if not resisted and denied, may lead to ruin. —*Lange.*

Verse 3. **True courage the fruit of righteousness.** 1 Regards worldly possessions as a sacred trust. 2. Witnesses for God in the midst of prevalent idolatry. 3. Dares to oppose the wishes of an unrighteous king.

— Naboth shows, by the very first words of his reply, that he is a worshipper of Jehovah, not of Baal; and that he does not fear to confess his faith before the idolatrous king. He also indicates by the form of his asseveration that he considers it would be wrong for him to comply with the

king's request. It is plain, therefore, that we have not here a mere refusal arising out of a spirit of sturdy independence, or one based upon sentiment—the sentiment which attaches men to ancestral estates. Naboth objects to the king's proposal *as wrong*. This is best explained by those passages of the law which forbid the alienation of landed property, and especially the transfer of estates from one tribe to another (Lev. xxv. 23-28; Num. xxxvi. 7).—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 4. Godless people regard the care taken by the pious to observe reverently the divine law as so much useless scrupulousness. Even so, in our day, does the worldling look with an evil eye upon the Christian who, for the sake of the Divine Word, refuses to yield to his wishes, for either he recognizes no divine authority, or exalts his own above it. The children of this world, whose aims and designs are wholly material, will often fret and grieve for days when they are compelled to give up a temporal gain, or a promised enjoyment, whilst the condition of their souls never causes them the slightest grief. The high and mighty ones of this world often think that all other people are placed here simply to yield obedience to their whims. They cannot comprehend that all men are not to be bought with gold, and woe to that inferior whose refusal destroys their darling plans.—*Lange.*

— O the impotent passion and insatiable desires of covetousness! Ahab is lord and king of all the territories of Israel: Naboth is the owner of one poor vineyard. Ahab cannot enjoy Israel if Naboth enjoy his vineyard. Whether is the wealthier? I do not hear Naboth wish for anything of Ahab's; I hear Ahab wishing, not without indignation of a repulse, for somewhat from Naboth. Riches and poverty are no more in the heart than in the hand: he is wealthy that is contented; he is poor that wanteth more.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 5-16. The apparently fortunate, but really unfortunate and accursed, marriage of Ahab and Jezebel. I. She seeks the sorrowful man, shares his grief, and seeks to comfort him, as is the province of a wife; but, instead of pointing him to the true Comforter, and leading his heart to higher and better things, she strengthens him in his grasping desire after others' property, and leads him on still further. II. She reminds him that he is the lord and master, and recognizes him as such, as a wife should; but, at the same moment, she assumes the dominion, and the weak man lets her manage and rule, as if she were the man and he the woman. III. She rejoices to accomplish an ardent wish of her husband's, and to make him a worthy present, as every faithful spouse should strive to do; but it is a blood-stained and stolen gift, obtained with deceit and falsehood, and Ahab delights in it. Thus both husband and wife, who together should be blest after God's ordinance, together walk on to ruin and destruction.—*Lange.*

Verses 5-14. The terrible power of an impious queen. I. Knows how to take advantage of a weak and fretful husband (verses 5-7). II. Shrinks not from adopting the most diabolical means of accomplishing her designs (verses 8-10). III. Can command accomplices in carrying out any deed of villany (verses 11, 12). IV. Is permitted to perpetrate the most horrible acts of cruelty and murder (verses 13, 14).

Verses 5-7. He that caused the disease sends him a physician. Satan knew of old how to make use of such helpers. Jezebel comes to Ahab's bedside, and casts cold water in his face, and puts into him spirits of her own extracting. Ahab wanted neither wit nor wickedness; yet is he in both a very novice to this Sidonian dame. There needs no other devil than Jezebel, whether to project evil or work it. She chides the pusillanimity of her dejected husband, and persuades him his rule cannot be free unless it

be licentious; that there should be no bounds to sovereignty but will. Already hath she contrived to have by fraud and force what was denied to entreaty. Nothing needs but the name, but the seal of Ahab: let her alone with the rest. How present are the wits of the weaker sex for the devising of wickedness!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 9. But what damnable dissimulation was it in this devilish creature to do her feats under pretext of a fast! This was like that Italian device of a pocket stone bow which, held under a cloak, shoots needles with violence to pierce a man's body, yet leaves a wound scarcely discernible; or, rather, that other, more detestable, of a pocket church-book with a pistol hid in the binding, which turning to such a page discharges—a plot to entrap him you hate, whilst you are at your devotions together, when there is less suspicion. If Jezebel proclaim a fast, let Naboth look to his life. The Jesuits enjoined a fast and set forth a sevenfold psalmody for the good success of the gunpowder plot; wherein, Rabshakeh-like, they would persuade the world that they come not up against us without the Lord!—*Trapp.*

Verses 11-14. Evil masters can ever find evil servants, who do their will from ambition or covetousness. Woe, where such things befall! and shame, that in the fairest lands, as in the plains of Jezreel, are often the worst men to be found! Godlessness and corruption in courts is a poison which extends throughout the whole body politic, even to the lowest rank; no example is so powerful upon all classes of society. How many gross, how many refined, sins are committed out of sheer complaisance to high personages, whose favour men wish to seek or preserve! Woe to those lords who find such ready tools in their servants, who will be accomplices in their misdoings, and palliate, or even laud and praise, all their perverse dealings: they undermine the throne more than open enemies. The judgment and condemnation of Naboth compared with that of our Lord. There, as in this instance, offended pride, followed by hatred, accusation of blasphemy and riot; false witnesses and vile judges; and a blind, infuriated populace crying out, Crucify! Crucify!—*Lange.*

Verses 15, 16. **Ill-gotten gains.** 1. Will not bear examination as to the methods of their acquisition. 2. Are eagerly and gladly seized. 3. Never give the satisfaction expected. 4. Entail unspeakable anxiety and suffering.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 17-29.

The Messenger of Approaching Doom.

The histories of the Old Testament were designed as standing lessons of edification to the church; by them, those who are dead may be considered as still speaking to us. They speak to us of the frailty of man, of the evil of sin and its certain punishment, of the spirituality of the law of God, of the need we have of a Saviour and a Sanctifier; they preach to us, as Paul did to Felix, of temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come, and they make us tremble. He who gives the dew, the sunbeam, the rain, and the snow to refresh and fertilize the world of nature, has given to us the promises, prophecies, doctrines, and histories of His Word to enrich and vivify the world of grace. In this paragraph we learn the effect of the message of God sent by Elijah in producing in Ahab a temporary humiliation; and the effect of Ahab's humiliation in securing a temporary reprieve.

I. That the messenger of approaching doom is divinely commissioned (verse 17). "The word of the Lord came to Elijah." Daring and fierce as

was Elijah, he would never have dared to pronounce this fearful doom on the house of Ahab if he had not been divinely authorized. It is a vast privilege to be the messenger of mercy to the erring, but it also involves the responsibility of sometimes being the messenger of wrath and judgment. Woe be to him who threatens more or less than God commands: in the one case he sins by presumption; in the other, by lack of fidelity. Some men are more fitted by temperament and training to be messengers of doom. The stern and faithful Elijah would not shrink from declaring all the counsel of God.

II. That the messenger of approaching doom comes to us when enjoying the fruits of the sin he denounces (verse 18). Ahab got his vineyard, entered into possession, and was enjoying its produce and the prospect of what he intended it to be, when he is startled by the voice of vengeance sounding in his ears. The scene is changed, the very leaves of the vineyard seem dripping with the blood of the murdered Naboth, demanding instant retribution! Every sinner carries in his breast an Elijah—an accusing conscience, which in the worst is never wholly extinct. As the serpent in the fable which, while frozen with cold, was torpid and insensible, and seemed utterly bereft of all vitality, yet when brought before the fire quickly recovered its venom and its strength, so conscience may remain dull and lifeless for a season; but when once, through the Providence of God or the force of affliction or the sentence of the law, it is quickened into life, the sinner will assuredly find that it has not lost its energy, and will never lose its sting. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear? By rendering our moral consciousness so acute and discriminating, God retains a powerful hold of the mind of man, and He has wonderfully adapted His holy Word to act upon our affections, to awaken our fears, and to exhibit before us the sad consequences of guilt.

III. That the messenger of approaching doom delivers his message with fearlessness and fidelity (verses 19-26). 1. *The doom is pronounced with unmistakable explicitness and fulness.* It is threefold in its application. The first had respect to Ahab himself (verse 19). The second to Jezebel (verse 23). The third had respect to the posterity of both (verses 21, 22, 24). As the sin of one is extended to and shared by others, so is its punishment. The sinner will be made fully aware of the sins for which he suffers, and it is this that will add sharpness to his suffering. 2. *The doom was justified by the excess of wickedness committed* (verses 20, 25, 26). These words intensify the thought of Ahab's extreme wickedness, and show the reason of the bitter judgments that were pronounced against him. He had become so utterly abandoned to sin and crime as to lose all moral principle and power to resist evil. He allowed himself to be completely governed by his wicked and imperious wife. Her influence caused him to introduce the worship of Baal (ch. xvi. 31), to allow the slaughter of the prophets of Jehovah (ch. xviii. 4), to let Elijah be driven into banishment (ch. xix. 2), and finally to murder Naboth and seize his land (verses 6 and 15). The justice of God provides that the punishment of the sinner shall be commensurate with the nature and extent of his sin.

IV. That the messenger of approaching doom may not always see the fulfilment of the prediction he is commanded to announce. 1. *Threatened doom may produce a temporary repentance* (verse 27). Under the severe threatening of the prophet, seconded by the sure voice of conscience, Ahab bowed himself to the dust, oppressed by a burden too heavy for him. What could be more foreign to the habits of this proud, luxurious, and tyrannical prince than sackcloth and fasting—than torn garments and the slow footstep and dejected

eye of penitential grief? What can be a greater proof of the power of God over the mind of sinners, when such a man is convinced, though he is not converted; is humbled, though he is not renewed. There may be a sorrow of the eyes, but not of the heart; sorrow for the threatened judgment, but not for the sin which provoked that judgment. 2. *A temporary repentance may delay threatened doom* (verses 28, 29). It is evident that Ahab's repentance, if repentance it may be called, was partial, transitory, and insincere, accompanied by no change of heart or life; but such as it was it illustrates God's readiness to notice the first symptoms of return. Ahab's humiliation shall prorogue the judgment: such as was the penitence, such shall be the reward—a temporary reward for a temporary penitence. If a partial penitent may be reprieved, surely a sincere believing penitent will be justified!

LESSONS:—1. *Sin cannot remain long without discovery.* 2. *God gives ample warning before He punishes the sinner.* 3. *God gives the utmost credit to the slightest symptoms of repentance: He is slow to wrath.* 4. *Repentance, if not genuine, though it may delay, will not finally avert, the deserved punishment.*

AHAB AND ELIJAH (verse 20).

The keynote of Elijah's character is *force*—the force of righteousness. The whole of his career is marked by this one thing—the strength of a righteous man. And then, on the other hand, this Ahab—the keynote of *his* character is the weakness of wickedness, and the wickedness of weakness Think of him weakly longing—as idle and weak minds in lofty places always do—after something that belongs to somebody else; with all his gardens, coveting the one little herb-plot of the poor Naboth; weak and worse than womanly, turning his face to the wall and weeping when he cannot get it; weakly desiring to have it, and yet not knowing how to set about accomplishing his wish; and then—as is always the case, for there are always tempters everywhere for weak people—that beautiful fiend by his side, like the other queen in our great drama, ready to screw the feeble man that she is wedded to, to the sticking place, and to dare anything, to grasp that on which the heart was set. And so the deed is done: Naboth safe stoned out of the way; and Ahab goes down to take possession! The lesson of that is, my friend, weak dallying with forbidden desires is sure to end in wicked clutching at them. The king gets the crime done, shuffles it off himself on to the shoulders of his ready tools in the little village, goes down to get his toy, and gets it, but he gets Elijah along with it, which was more than he reckoned on. When, all full of impatience and hot haste to solace himself with his new possession, he rushes down to seize the vineyard, he finds there, standing at the gate, waiting for him—black-browed, motionless, grim, an incarnate conscience—the prophet he had not seen for years, the prophet he had last seen on Carmel bearding alone the servants of Baal, and executing on them the solemn judgment of death; and there leaps at once to his lip, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

I. I find here, in the first place, this broad principle: **Pleasure won by sin is peace lost.** That is my first thought. Ah! my brother, it does not need that there should be a rebuking prophet standing by to work out that law. God commits the execution of it to the natural operations of our own consciences and our spirits. 1. Here is the fact in men's natures on which it partly depends: when sin is yet tempting us, it is loved; when sin is done, it is loathed. Action and reaction, as the mechanicians tell us, are equal and contrary. The more violent the blow with which we strike upon the forbidden pleasure, the further back the rebound after the stroke. When sin tempts—when there hangs glittering before a man the golden fruits that he knows he

ought not to touch, then, amidst the noise of passion or the sophistry of desire, conscience is silenced for a little while. Like a mad bull, the man that is tempted lowers his head and shuts his eyes, and rushes right on. The moment that the sin is done, that moment the passion or desire which tempted to it is satiated, and ceases to exist for the time. Passion fulfils itself and expires. The desire is satisfied, and it turns into a loathing. The tempter draws us to him, and then unveils the horrid face that lies beneath the mask. When the deed is done and cannot be undone, then comes satiety; then comes the reaction of the fierce excitement, the hot blood begins to flow more slowly; then rises up in the heart, conscience; then rises up in majesty in the soul, reason; then flashes and flares before the eye the vivid picture of the consequences. His enemy has found the sinner. He has got the vineyard—Ay, but Elijah is there, and his dark and stern presence sucks all the brightness and the sunshine out of the landscape; and Naboth's blood stains the leaves of Naboth's garden! There is no sin which is not the purchase of pleasure at the price of peace. 2. The silence of a seared conscience is not peace. For peace, you want something more than that a conscience shall be dumb. For peace, you want something more than that you shall be able to live without the daily sense and sting of sin. You want not only the negative absence of pain, but the positive presence of a tranquillising guest in your heart—that conscience of yours, testifying with you, blessing you in its witness, and shedding abroad rest and comfort. It is easy to kill a conscience, after a fashion, at least. It is easy to stifle it. As the old historian says about the Roman armies that marched through a country, burning and destroying everything: "They make a solitude, and they call it peace;" and so men do with their living consciences: they stifle them, sear them, forcibly silence them somehow or other, and then, when there is a dead stillness in the heart, broken by no voice of either approbation or blame, but doleful, like the unnatural quiet of a deserted city, then they say it is peace, and the man's uncontrolled passions and unbridled desires dwell solitary in the fortress of his own spirit! You *may* almost attain to that. Do you think it is a goal to be set before you as an ideal of human nature? The loss of peace is certain, the presence of agony is most likely, from every act of sin. 3. And so it is not only a *crime* that men count it when they do wrong, but it is a *blunder*. Sin is not only guilt, but it is a mistake. "The game is not worth the candle," according to the French proverb. The thing that you buy is not worth the price you pay for it. Sin is like a great forest-tree that we may sometimes see standing up green in its leafy beauty, and spreading a broad shadow over half a field; but when we get round on the other side, there is a great dark hollow in the very heart of it, and corruption is at work there. It is like the poison tree in travellers' stories, tempting weary men to rest beneath its thick foliage, and insinuating death into the limbs that relax in the fatal coolness of its shade. It is like the apples of Sodom, fair to look upon, but turning to acrid ashes on the unwary lips. It is like the magician's rod that we read about in old books. There it lies; and if tempted by its glitter, or fascinated by the power it proffers you, you take it in your hand, the thing starts into a serpent with erected crest and sparkling eye, and plunges its quick barb into the hand that holds it, and sends poison through all its veins. Do not touch it. Every sin buys pleasure at the price of peace. Elijah is always waiting at the gate of the ill-gotten possession.

II. Sin is blind to its true friends and its real foes. "Hast thou found me, O mine *enemy*?" Elijah was the best friend he had in his kingdom. And that Jezebel there, the wife of his bosom, whom he loved and thanked for this thing, she was the worst foe that hell could have sent him. Ay, and so it is always. The faithful rebuker, the merciful inflictor of pain, is the

truest friend of the wrong-doer. The worst enemy of the sinful heart is the voice that either tempts it into sin, or lulls it into self-complacency. 1. And this is one of the certainest workings of evil desires in our spirits, that they pervert for us all relations of things—that they make us blind to all the moral truths of God's universe. Sin is blind as to itself, blind as to its own consequences, blind as to who are its friends and who are its foes, blind as to earth, blind as to another world, blind as to God. The man that walks in the vain show of transgression, whose heart is set upon evil—he fancies that ashes are bread, and stones gold (as in the old fairy story); and, on the other hand, he thinks that the true sweet is the bitter, and turns away from God's angels and God's prophets with "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" That is the reason, my friend, of not a little of the infidelity that haunts this world—that sin perverted and blinded stumbles about in its darkness, and mistakes the face of the friend for the face of the foe. 2. And then, again, God sends us a Gospel full of dark words about evil. It deals with that fact of sin as no other system ever did. There is no book like the Bible for these two things—for the lofty notion that it has about what man may be and ought to be, and for the notion that it has of what man is. It does not degrade human nature because it tells us the truth about human nature as it is. The darkest and bitterest sayings about transgression, they are veiled promises. It does not make the consequences of sin which it writes down. You and I make them for ourselves, and it tells us of them. Did the lighthouse make the rock that it stands on? Is it to be blamed for the shipwreck? If a man will go full tilt against the thing which he knows will ruin him, what is the right name for him that hedges it up with a prickly fence of thorns, and puts a great light above it, and writes below, "If thou comest here, thou diest?" Is that the work of an enemy? And yet that is why people talk about the gloomy views of the Gospel, about the narrow spirit of Christianity, about the harsh things that are here! The Bible did not make hell. The Bible did not make sin the parent of sorrow. The Bible did not make it certain that "any transgression and disobedience should reap its just recompense of reward." We are the causes of their coming upon ourselves; and the Bible but proclaims the end to which the paths of sin must lead, and beseechingly calls to us all, "Turn ye, turn ye! why will ye die?" And yet, when it comes to you, how many of you turn away from it, and say, "It is mine enemy!" 3. Ay, and more than that: sin makes us fancy that God Himself is our enemy; and sin makes that thought of God that ought to be most blessed and most sweet to us, the terror of our souls. God will not let us alone when we transgress. God in His love hath appointed that sin shall breed sorrow. But *we*—we do wrong; and then, for God's Providence, and God's Gospel, and God's Son, and God Himself, there rises up in our hearts the hostile feeling, and we think that He is turned our enemy, and fights against us! But oh! He only fights against us that we may submit, and love Him. If He comes to you with rebuke, and meets you when you are at the very door of your sin, and busy with your transgression, usher Him in, and thank Him, and bless Him for words of threatening, for merciful severity, for conviction of sin; because conviction of sin is the work of the Comforter; and all the threatenings and all the pains that follow and track like swift hounds the committer of evil, are sent by Him who loves too wisely not to punish transgression, and loves too well to punish without warning, and desires only, when He punishes, that we should turn from our evil way, and escape the condemnation. An enemy, or a friend—*which* is God in His truth to you?

III. The sin which mistakes the friendly appeal for an enemy lays up for itself a terrible retribution. 1. Elijah comes here and prophesies the fall of Ahab. The next peal, the next flash, fulfil the prediction. There,

where he did the wrong, he died. In Jezreel, Ahab died. In Jezreel, Jezebel died. The threatened evil was foretold that it might lead the king to repentance, and that thus it might never need to be more than a threat: but, though Ahab was partially penitent, and partially listened to the prophet's voice, yet, for all that, he went on in his evil way. Therefore the merciful threatening becomes a stern prophecy, and is fulfilled to the very letter. And so when God's message comes to us, if we listen not to it, and turn not to its gentle rebuke, Oh! then we gather up for ourselves an awful futurity of judgment, when threatening darkens into punishment, and the voice that rebuked swells into the voice of final condemnation. 2. When a man fancies that God's prophet is his enemy, and dreams that his finding him out is a calamity and a loss, that man may be certain that something worse will find him out some day. His sins will find him out, and that is worse than the prophet's coming! Picture to yourself this—a human spirit shut up with the companionship of its forgotten and dead transgressions! There is a resurrection of acts, as well as of bodies. Think what it will be for a man to sit surrounded by that ghastly company, the ghosts of his own sins!—and as each forgotten fault and buried badness comes, silent and sheeted, into that awful society, and sits itself down there, think of him greeting each with the question, "Thou too? What! are you all here? Hast *thou* found me, O mine enemy?" And from each bloodless spectral lip there tolls out the answer, the knell of his life: "I *have* found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." 3. Ah! my friend, if that were all we had to say, it might well stiffen us into stony despair. Thank God—thank God! such an issue is not inevitable. Christ speaks to you. Christ is your *friend*. He loves you, and He speaks to you now—speaks to you of your danger, but in order that you may never rush into it and be engulphed by it; speaks to you of your sin, but in order that you may say to him, "Take thou it away, O merciful Lord;" speaks to you of justice, but in order that you may never sink beneath the weight of His stroke; speaks to you of love, in order that you may know, and fully know, the depth of His graciousness. When he says to you, "I love thee; love thou Me; I have died for thee; trust Me, live by Me, and live for Me," will you not say to Him, "My Friend, My Brother, My Lord, and My God"?—(*Condensed from A. Maclaren*).

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 17-29. The inevitable doom of a wicked life. I. Does not come without sufficient warning. II. Will be commensurate with the sins committed. III. May be averted by timely repentance.

Verse 17. Though much wickedness goes apparently without further evil results and without the chastisement of the just Judge in heaven, yet still all will be demanded; and at the Divine judgment-seat everything will be discovered, and everything, to the uttermost farthing, accounted for. The blood of Naboth, which Ahab thought had been swallowed up by the earth, cried to heaven, and found there judgment and vengeance. Like a lightning flash comes the word from heaven into the dark soul of Ahab, and made him feel that no net of human evil can be woven thickly enough to conceal the crime which it veils from the all-seeing eye.—*Menken.*

Verse 19. "Hast *thou* killed?" Individual responsibility for wrong doings. 1. Not transferable. 2. Not to be evaded, though others commit the wrong to which we consent. 3. Unalterably recognised in punishment.

— "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth," &c. So Aristobulus, king of Jewry, vomited abundance of blood, and soon after breathed his last, in the very place where he had slain his brother Antigonus, and

acknowledged it to be the just hand of God upon himself. So Selymus, the great Turk, struck with a loathsome and incurable disease, ended his days at Chiurlus with an untimely and tormenting death, where he had disloyally joined battle against his aged father Bajazet, A.D. 1511. So Henry III., king of France, was stabbed to death by a Jacobin friar in that very chamber where he and his bloody brother Charles IX. had, some few years before, plotted the Parisian massacre.—*Trapp.*

Verses 20-26. Great wickedness and terrible retribution. I. Idolatry is a great abomination in the sight of God. II. There is no possible sin an idolater may not be instigated to commit. III. The consequences of sin and its punishment extend to others.

Verse 20. An unwelcome visitor. I. *The question of Ahab.* "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" 1. This question indicates past association. "Thou!" Ahab had frequently met with Elijah before: in the previous chapters we find the prophet and the king in most intimate relationships. 2. The question indicates disquietude on the part of Ahab. Directly the stately form of Elijah appeared to him, the greed, passion, and murder of the last few days crowded in upon his memory. How happy that Christian man whose very presence strikes terror into the sinful heart! 3. This question shows that criminal offenders often pass an incorrect judgment upon men who administer rebuke to them. Ahab designates Elijah his enemy. What a mistake! Had not the prophet been the instrument of benefit to the king and his country? Had he not prayed on Mount Carmel that the drought might cease, and had he not worked at the same time for the extermination of idolatry? What more could he have done, either for the temporal or spiritual welfare of his compeers? And yet Ahab calls such a man an enemy, when he was in reality his truest friend! See the blinding power of covetousness! 4. We gather from this question that the gratification of unholy desire never brings tranquillity. Humanly speaking, Ahab was in the very height of success. He was a king, the long-desired vineyard had come into his possession. What is there to prevent enjoyment? Surely nothing. Yes; God vindicates the oppressed; and though Naboth is dead, he is not forgotten. Heaven will not permit so foul a deed to go unpunished. Hence the monarch's unrest. II. *The response of Elijah.* "I have found thee." 1. Elijah was divinely commissioned to seek Ahab. "And the Word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it" (verses 17, 18). How God pursues evil men with mercy! Even punishment is but love speaking with more emphatic voice. Elijah was obedient to the expressed wish of God; he did not plead timidity at standing to rebuke a monarch; but went boldly and faithfully to perform his duty. What a happy pattern of a Christian minister! 2. The reason assigned for the search. "I have found thee because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." The prophet, no doubt, came to *rebuke* Ahab, and also to be instrumental in his reformation. The king must not be left without some effort for his restoration to purity of character. When ministers know that men have fallen into deep sin, they should at once visit them, to prevent further apostacy, and, if possible, to repair the past. In doing this the prophet may meet with an unkindly greeting, but the ultimate issue will be good. 3. How high social position is frequently degraded. We find here that a king had sold himself to sin. Kings, of all men, should be righteous in their conduct, as their example must necessarily exercise a great influence upon the nation to which they belong. How fearful their responsibility! What a terrible bargain had Ahab

made: "Sold thyself to work evil!" 1. It was a voluntary bargain—"Thyself." 2. It was a mad bargain—"To work evil." For how many lives would this be a fitting inscription! To work evil seems to be the life-purpose of many around us. Think of the destiny to which this will lead them! Let the time past of our lives suffice in which we have wrought evil.—*J. S. Exell.*

— Great is the power of conscience. Upon the last meeting, for aught we know, Ahab and Elijah parted friends. The prophet had lackeyed his coach and took a peaceful leave at this town's end: now, Ahab's heart told him, neither needed he any other messenger that God and His prophet were fallen out with him. His continuing idolatry, now seconded with blood, bids him look for nothing but frowns from heaven. A guilty heart can never be at peace. Had not Ahab known how ill he had deserved of God, he had never saluted his prophet by the name of an enemy: he had never been troubled to be found by Elijah, if his own breast had not found him out for an enemy to God. Much good may thy vineyard do thee, O thou king of Israel! Many fair flowers and savoury herbs may thy new garden yield thee! Please thyself with thy Jezebel in the triumph over the carcass of a scrupulous subject. Let me rather die with Naboth than rejoice with thee: his turn is over, thine is to come. The stones that overwhelmed innocent Naboth were nothing to those that smite thee. —*Bp. Hall.*

— It is Ahab's guilty conscience which forces these words from him the moment he sees Elijah. He has no object in uttering them. He feels that the last man whom he would have wished to see has come suddenly upon him, and found him—*i.e., caught* him—in the act of doing a great wrong. "O mine enemy," may refer partly to the old antagonism (ch. xvii. 1; xviii. 17, 18; xix. 2, 3); but the feeling which it expresses is rather that of present opposition—the opposition between good and evil, light and darkness, through which "everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, *lest his deeds should be reproved*" (Jno. iii. 20).—*Speaker's Com.*

Verse 25. Woe to the man who through the power that love gives him over the heart of another, by means of which he might become a ministering angel, is to him as a misleading fiend. How many fires of ruinous passion, of anger, of discord, of unrighteousness, and of hatred might and should be quenched and extinguished by the power of love—the power of one heart over another, and especially by the mildness and gentleness peculiar to woman; and yet so often, by this means, they are kindled and fanned This belongs to the catalogue of unconfessed sins of many men, and especially of many women.—*Menken.*

Verses 27-29. **A royal penitent.** 1. Humbled by the terror of threatened wrath. 2. Did not seek to repair the wrong he had done. 3. Had the outward signs of sincerity. 4. Was granted a temporary reprieve.

Verse 27. **What gave Ahab's repentance its worth, and wherein it was defective.** 1. It was not merely ostensible, feigned, it was a wholesome dread and fear of the judgment of God which came upon him, causing him to fear and tremble. He bowed beneath the mighty hand of God, and was not ashamed to confess this outwardly, but laid aside crown and purple, and put on sackcloth, unheeding if he thus exposed himself to the scorn of the courtiers and idol worshippers. Therefore the Lord looked in mercy upon his repentance. Would that, in our day, many would go even as far as Ahab did in this case. 2. It bore no further fruits. He retained the stolen vineyard, he desisted not from idol-worship, he allowed full sway to Jezebel. Everything in his house, at his court, and in his kingdom, remained as of old. He did not hunger and thirst after righteousness. Fleeting impressions and emotions are not true repent-

ance. The tree which brings forth no fruits is and remains a corrupt tree (Matt. iii. 8). How wholly different the repentance of David (Psa. li).—*Lange.*

— The very devils howl to be tormented. Grief is not ever a sign of grace. Ahab rends his clothes, he did not rend his heart; he puts on sackcloth, not amendment; he lies in sackcloth, but he lies in his idolatry; he walks softly, he walks not sincerely. Worldly sorrow causeth death. Happy is that grief for which the soul is the holier.—*Bp. Hall.*

— The repentance of Ahab resembles that of the Ninevites (Jonah iii. 5). It has the same outward signs—fasting and sackcloth—and it has much the same inward character. It springs not from love, nor from hatred of sin, but from fear of the consequences of sin. It is thus, although sincere and real while it lasts, shallow and exceedingly short-lived. God, however, to mark His readiness to receive the sinner who turns to Him, accepts the imperfect offering, as He likewise accepted the penitence of the Ninevites, and allows it to delay the execution of the sentence. Because Ahab humbled himself, the evil was deferred from his own to his son's days (verse 29). So the penitence of the Ninevites put off the fall of Nineveh for a century.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 29. Jehovah makes this announcement, not because He will punish the son for the sins of his father, but because He foresees that the son will also do evil in the sight of the Lord, and will, therefore, like his father, deserve punishment.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DEATH OF AHAB.

Critical and Explanatory Notes.—Verse 2. **Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel**—This visit is accounted for in Chronicles (chap. xviii. 1): Jehoshaphat came to Israel for the marriage of his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter, Athaliah (see 2 Kings viii. 18). Ahab entertained with sumptuous hospitality Jehoshaphat and his immense retinue, composed largely of military officers; and then seized the occasion for forming an alliance with the king of Judah against the Syrian king for the recovery of Ramoth-in-Gilead. Verse 14. **I am as thou art**—The Chronicles' account omits the words "my horses as thy horses," and gives instead וְעִמְּךָ בַּמִּלְחָמָה, "and I am with thee in the war."

Verse 5. **Enquire of the Lord**—The king of Judah had conscientious misgivings; such, indeed, as were unlikely to trouble the godless Ahab. Verse 6. **The prophets**—The number, "400," must not mislead. They were not the Astarte prophets again reinstated (xviii. 19, 22), but a group of men who continued Jeroboam's Jehovah-worship (calf worship) in the land, and were probably employed by Ahab for seductive religious purposes, to estrange the nation from the true worship of Jehovah. **Go up; for the Lord shall deliver *it* into the hands of the king**—Notice: "it" is in italics; omit the word, and the prophets merely affirm that the Lord shall deliver—what? Ramoth or Israel?—into the hands of the king. What king? Ramoth into Jehoshaphat's (or Ahab's) hands, or Israel into the king of Syria's hands? Couched as their prediction is in ambiguous terms they evade the responsibility of failure. Thus did the Delphian oracle reply to Pyrrhus: *Aio te Æcida, Romanos vincere posse: Ibis redibis nunquam in bello peribis.* "I say to thee Pyrrhus the Romans shall overcome; thou shalt go, thou shalt return never in war shalt thou perish;" which may mean, Pyrrhus shall overcome the Romans; that he should return; never in war should he perish; or, the Romans should overcome Pyrrhus, he should return never; in war he should perish. All depended on the punctuation of the sentence. This prophecy is alike equivocal. Verse 7. **Is there not a prophet of the Lord besides?**—Perhaps Jehoshaphat had heard rumours of Elijah, and referred to him. Verse 8. **Micaiah the son of Imlah**—Who was this? Strong probabilities favour the conclusion that he was the nameless prophet of chap. xx. 13, 35-41. Whether this man or not, Micaiah had incurred the guilty king's hatred, which is to the honour of the prophet, for Ahab counted every man his "enemy" (xxi. 20) who denounced his iniquitous conduct.

Verse 9. Hasten hither Micaiah—He was doubtless then in the prison to which he was afterwards carried back (verse 27). Verse 10. **In a void place**—בַּגֹּרֶן, probably an open threshing-floor. Verse 11. **Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah**—One of the "four hundred" who sought to convince the kings by assuming the symbolic manners of a prophet, probably for the misapplication in the present instance of the grand promise formerly made to Ephraim (Deut. xxxiii. 17). Verse 15. **Go and prosper, &c.**—Micaiah repeats the delusive words, as in irony. The angry king sees it to be mockery (verse 16); yet he resents with greater indignation the "true" word. Verse 19. **I saw the Lord sitting on His throne**—This is not a parabolic form of speech, but a solemn recital of a prophetic vision. Verse 20. **Persuade Ahab**—Entice. Verse 21. **A spirit**—הָרוּחַ, *the* spirit; definite art., *i.e.*, the prophetic spirit which moved the prophets to speak (1 Sam. x. 6, 10; xix. 20, 23). Jehovah permits this "spirit" (which must not be identified with the Spirit Divine) to use the perverted prophetic gifts of Ahab's prophets for Ahab's merited ruin. Ahab would have false prophecy, false prophecy he shall have. God gave him over to believe a lie (Rom. i. 28). Verse 22. **I will be a lying spirit**—רוּחַ שֶׁקֶר—not Satan, assuredly, nor *aliquem ex Satanæ familia* (as Grot.); for this spirit only assumed falsity for the time, whereas Satan was "a liar from the beginning." Verse 24. **Zedekiah . . smote Micaiah**—Feeling himself, after his ostentatious conduct (verse 11), especially insulted. *Keil* thinks Zedekiah could only have come thus boldly forward "because he was conscious to himself that he had not feigned his oracle." Possibly so; then this proves how the "spirit" had really moved these men to prophecy falsely unknowingly to themselves. Zedekiah's insolence called out no rebuke from Ahab, nor Micaiah's endurance his praise. Verse 28. **And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you**—These are the words with which Micah the prophet opens his book (Micah i. 2), and manifestly were interpolated by some scribe who identified Micaiah with Micah. Verse 32. **They turned aside to fight against him**—וַיָּסֻרוּ—they turned to him. *Sept.* has ἐκυκλωσαν, *surrounded* him. Verse 34.—**Drew a bow at a venture**—*Lit.*, "in his simplicity." So 2 Sam. xv. 11. Verse 38. **They washed his armour**—A manifestly incorrect reading. Lit., *The harlots bathed*; either bathed *him*, or themselves bathed in the stream stained with his blood, his chariot having been washed therein. To the prediction chap. xxi. 19, the *Sept.* adds: "And the harlots shall wash themselves in thy blood." Theodoret says it was customary for harlots—probably temple prostitutes—to bathe at evening. Verse 41. **History of the reign of Jehoshaphat of Judah**—Scant records of Judah occur in the Scriptures, but *Chronicles* give them more fully. Verse 46. **The sodomites . . he took out of the land**—*Lit.*, extinguished from the land. Verse 49. **Then said Ahaziah**—At that time king of Israel. He wished to unite with Jehoshaphat in maritime expeditions; the explanation of his refusal is found in 2 Chron. xx. 35-37. **Ezion-geber** (verse 48) **abounds in perilous and destructive rocks.**—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-28.

The Faithful Prophet.

1. Is indispensable in great emergencies. 1. *Is appealed to in times of national difficulty* (verses 1-7). A coalition had been formed between the kings of Israel and Judah. The common danger to which they were exposed from the growing power of Syria led them to forget for a time their differences, and to combine for mutual protection. War was determined upon to wrest from the hands of Benhadad one of the cities he had failed to give up according to treaty (ch. xx. 34). The four hundred prophets of Ahab declared unanimously in favour of the war, and assured the allied monarchs of victory. But there was something wanting. The pious Jehoshaphat was suspicious of the four hundred; and, in so grave a crisis, demanded a clearer indication of the Divine will. The faithful prophet was needed. Great national emergencies demand the utmost care and thought of men of piety and intelligence. 2. *Is appealed to despite the hatred of those who are compelled against their will to consult him* (verse 8). Probably it was this Micaiah who uttered against Ahab the oracle referred to in ch. xx. 42. "O corrupt heart of self-condemned Ahab! If Micaiah spake

true to thee, how was it evil? If others said false, how was it good? And if Micaiah spake from the Lord, why dost thou hate him? This hath wont to be the ancient lot of truth, censure and hatred: censure of the message, hatred of the bearer." Yet, however much the faithful counsellor is disliked, his services are valued, and often anxiously sought. Cincinnatus was twice called from his farm to the dictatorship of the Roman commonwealth, though the opposing parties would have dispensed with his services if they could.

II. Is favoured with signal opportunities of declaring the will of God (verses 9-12). The two kings were seated on their thrones in a conspicuous place, robed in royal vestments, attended by the gaily dressed officers of the court and by the ministering priests, and surrounded by warlike horsemen and infantry. The leading representatives of church and state were assembled together, and the people in great number. It was an opportunity not to be neglected. The faithful, earnest worker will never lack opportunities; and his divinely implanted instincts will teach what are the great opportunities of life, when God can be most honoured.

III. Declares only what is divinely revealed. 1. *He spurns all attempts at bribery* (verses 13, 14). The messenger who went for Micaiah seeks to influence him to speak to the same effect as the false prophets, and assured him that by doing so he would win the royal favour. "Those who adore earthly greatness think every man should doat on their idols, and hold no terms too high for their ambitious purchases. Faithful Micaiah scorns the notion: he knows the price of the word, and condemns it. Neither fears nor favours can tempt the holily resolute. They can trample upon dangers or honours with a careless foot; and, whether they be smiled or frowned on by the great, dare not either alter or conceal their errand." 2. *Is not intimidated by the presence of royalty.* (1). Ironically exposes and rebukes the false (verse 15). Micaiah uttered the same words as the four hundred prophets; but by his manner of voice and look imitated the irony of Elijah at Carmel, as if to suggest to Ahab how misleading and unworthy of Jehovah was such an ambiguous oracle as theirs. This mocking manner, which might be familiar to Micaiah, galls by its contemptuousness: it is a dangerous weapon; should be judiciously used; in some hands it is strikingly effective. (2). Speaks the truth, though it is unpleasant to royal ears (verses 16-18). Micaiah wholly changes his tone, becomes profoundly serious, and relates his vision, the meaning of which Ahab could not possibly mistake, especially as the metaphor of "sheep and shepherd" for king and people was familiar to the Israelites from the prayer of Moses (Num. xxvii. 17). "He was resolved to speak the naked truth, though he were sure to kiss the stocks for his stiffness." The man who is inspired to declare the Divine will is raised far above the fear of his fellow-creatures, whether they are robed in silks or in rags.

IV. Is sustained and confirmed in his work by heavenly visions (verses 19-23). A vision like this of the ineffable glory of Jehovah was a great favour, and only granted on special occasions and for special ends. It was granted to Isaiah (Isaiah vi. 1), who immediately supposed he must die, because he had seen the King, the Lord of Hosts; to Ezekiel (Ezek. i. 26); to Daniel (vii. 9); and in Christian times it was allowed to Stephen (Acts vii. 56) and John (Rev. iv. 2). Thus God prepares His servants for special work by a course of training and discipline in every way suited to bring about its faithful accomplishment—by special arrangements of His providence, and by special and striking displays of His glory. The man who sees the Lord, and gains an insight into heavenly realities, will be filled with indomitable courage and perseverance.

V. Is often called to suffer for his faithfulness (verses 24-27). The king to whom his fidelity was disagreeable had cast Micaiah into prison, and the leading spirit of the four hundred prophets, whose falseness and delusion he had exposed, struck the bound and helpless prisoner, unrebuked by the great ones in whose presence the insult and injury were committed. "It was enough for Ahab to punish with the hand: no weapon was for Zedekiah but his tongue; neither could this rude presumption have been well taken, if malice had not made magistracy insensible of this usurpation. Ahab was well content to see that hated mouth beaten by any hand. It is no new condition of God's faithful messengers to smart for saying truth. Falsehood does not more betray itself in anything than in blows: truth suffers, while error persecutes. None are more ready to boast of the Spirit of God than those that have the least; as in vessels, the full are silent."

VI. Is not hindered by suffering from proclaiming his message (verse 28). Though smitten and dragged back to prison, and threatened with the harshest treatment (verse 27), the faithful Micaiah persists in maintaining the truthfulness of his message, and calls upon the people to bear witness to it. How little do we know of suffering compared with what our forefathers endured for the truth. We should be more energetic and earnest than they in making known the will of God. There is danger that immunity from suffering should render us less, rather than more, concerned in upholding and propagating the truth. We prize that most for which we suffer most.

LESSONS:—1. *It is a calamity to a nation when every faithful voice is hushed.* 2. *The faithful prophet is often alone in his witness-bearing.* 3. *The faithful are nevertheless sustained by Jehovah, and will be by-and-by acknowledged and rewarded by Him.*

THE MAN WHO SAW THE LORD (verse 19).

The prophets frown; the king turns pale; the people hiss; while the uncompromising man of God delivers the unwelcome message. He is the master spirit of that great multitude. How are we to account for his commanding power? The text (verse 19) is the line that fathoms the mystery, the key which unlocks the secret. "*I saw the Lord.*" We are no longer astonished at the effect now we know the cause. We think we can understand the man's behaviour; after such a sight, earth's poor pomp must have appeared trivial indeed. Faith's perception of God has ever been the strength of the Church. True—

> "Not with our mortal eyes,
> Have we beheld the Lord,"

yet, Moses like, the Church "endures," as seeing Him invisible. Notice—

I. The man who sees the Lord can best understand life's mysteries. 1. We need not attempt to prove that *life has its mysteries.* The Psalmist was not the only one who had been perplexed by them (Psa. lxxiii. 2-17). Many a good man's faith has staggered under the burden of mysterious providences. Micaiah was a "man of like passions" to ourselves. It must have sorely tried him to see godless Ahab upon a throne; godless prophets basking in royal favour and popular esteem; whilst he—who, true to his convictions, had trodden the path of duty—was shut up in a dungeon. But God's presence can transform a dungeon to a palace. The dungeon was heaven's ante-room. "I saw the Lord"—such a sight would wean his soul from earthly delights, and help him to understand the hollowness of earthly grandeur and pomp. 2.

Micaiah also understood the *mysteries of the Divine government.* "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." The imprisoned prophet had seen the moving power—the unseen forces that had acted upon the four hundred prophets. He had heard the evil spirit obtain permission to lure Ahab to his ruin. He knew that the king was given over to believe a delusion and a lie, that his damnation might be more speedy. He alone, of all the crowd, regarded him as a ruined man. While others were feasting their eyes with the trappings of royal pageantry, he saw the fingers writing "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin." He understood the unanimity of the prophets. There were four hundred *Ayes*, to one *No; a miserable minority*, the people said, and Jehoshaphat thought so too, or he would not have accompanied the doomed expedition. But truth is never in a minority. The man who has God on his side is always with the majority. Such was Moses in Pharaoh's court; Luther before the Diet at Worms; Whitfield amid the showers of rotten eggs on Kennington Common. Such is the God-fearing young man in the shop or warehouse; who, amid the taunts of ungodly associates, maintains a Christian bearing, and testifies to the Gospel's worth.

II. The man who sees the Lord can best perform life's duties. 1. *God sometimes calls His people to very unpleasant duties.* It is not pleasant to run counter to the wishes of friends by giving our protest against their cherished projects. Yet this was what Micaiah had to do. He knew the consequences of such a course; he would exasperate a king whom he had already offended; he would make his own punishment more severe and intolerable than it had already been; he would become the object of popular hatred and contempt. Yet "none of these things moved him." God had the first claim. He had seen the Lord, and that sight had changed unpleasant duties into delightful pleasures 2. *The sight of the Lord is essential to the possession of qualifications necessary for religious work.* 'Tis the basis upon which faith rests. Strong faith is the mainspring of earnest work. Unbelief paralyzes Christian effort. The man who has never seen the Lord is not the man for church work. Colleges cannot give this qualification. Ten minutes beside the burning bush was more useful in preparing Moses for his work, than all the years he had spent in acquiring "all the wisdom of the Egyptian." It took Gamaliel years to train young Saul to be a bigoted persecutor. It didn't take five minutes for Christ to change him to a devoted Apostle, and from that hour his life testified the truth of his assertion, that he "looked at the things which are not seen." 3. *A sight of the Lord will cause men to regard worldly interests and personal comforts as secondary matters.* The narrative does not give the name of the officer who conducted the prisoner into the royal presence. John Bunyan would call him Worldly Wiseman. The man regarded his prisoner with something akin to pity; his haggard face and bent form moved him to advise him concerning his conduct before the king: "Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth; let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good." The man didn't mean what he said; he meant: "Speak that which is pleasing." And Micaiah said: "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak." How that reply would annoy the officer, who would regard him as an obstinate and foolish man, whose singular folly merited all the punishment he would get. He would not understand such a man. A word, and his rags would be exchanged for purple and fine linen: from a dungeon to a court; from famine to plenty; from degradation to position and fame. But he would not speak the word; he was no time-server to pander to popular taste. "What the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak."

III. The man who sees the Lord can best endure life's sufferings. The prison is no longer a prison if God is there. God loves to favour His suffering

people with manifestations of His presence, whether it be the three young men in the fiery furnace, or Paul in prison, or John on Patmos; all alike shall testify that "He is a very present help in trouble." It was, probably, when Paul had been beaten so severely by his foes as to be unconscious of all around him, afterwards unable to tell whether he was "in the body or out of the body," that he was caught up into the third heaven, and heard God say: "My grace is sufficient for thee." We know it was when they had many stripes laid upon them, after they had been subjected to the rough violence of a brutal mob, and had spent hours with their swollen limbs in the stocks, that "at midnight Paul and Silas sang, and the prisoners heard them." Such sounds had never before been heard through the gloomy corridors of the prison; groans and curses had been frequently heard there, but joyous Christian song, never. That inner cell was dark—so dark, that though bolts and bars and fetters were felt, they could not be seen; but the apostles saw the Lord that night, and "endured as seeing Him who is invisible." A wild, excited mob is dragging a prisoner along to execution; the most brutal passions are depicted in their countenance; they cannot reserve their insults and cruelty until they reach the spot where the bloody scene is to be enacted; as they drag, they beat and stone him. But mark his face, how calm, how joyous! And when they reach the place, the victim stands until the stones bruise and gash his frame, but the blood cannot wash out the expression of joy from holy Stephen's face. We can account for that joy: had he not just said: "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Such a sight enabled him to endure the suffering; and, in an atmosphere charged with the hatred of hell, and amid a storm of death-dealing missiles, he calmly lay down and "fell asleep." The presence of God is the saints' solace under suffering. Micaiah saw more splendours in his prison than Ahab in his palace. That cell was illuminated by the ineffable light, and visited by the aristocracy. Rutherford compared his dungeon to the king's cellar, where all the best wines were kept; and like Micaiah he would sing—

"Thy presence, Lord, can cheer
This dungeon where we dwell;
'Tis heaven itself if Thou art near—
If Thou depart 'tis hell."

IV. The man who sees the Lord can best wait for life's rewards. Alas! how many have sacrificed truth and a good conscience for earthly rewards! Micaiah could wait for future rewards. Ahab could not have rewarded him—he had nothing that could have satisfied him. He had seen the Lord, and the light of the Divine presence revealed how valueless earth's poor tinsel baubles are. Nothing but heaven could satisfy him—

"Had I a glance of Thee, my God,
Kingdoms and men should vanish soon;
Vanish as though I saw them not,
As a dim candle dies at noon."

We can imagine the same officer taking him back, and, as the jailor pushed him into his dark cell, he would say—"Serve him right!" And then he would tell the jailor about the events of the day, and how foolish the prisoner had behaved in being so blind to his own interests, and then they would talk about what Ahab meant by keeping him until "I come in peace." Did he mean to restore him to liberty then? They knew better than that. The day of Ahab's return would be the day of Micaiah's death. Such would be their rational conclusion. How much or how long he suffered we cannot tell, but we know it was well with him to the last. "Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him."—Condensed from *The Christian Age* for 1873.

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-28. King Ahab appears here in the last act of his career, just as we have seen him always hitherto, devoid of religious or moral character. His penitence, which seemed so earnest, and which certainly falls in the period immediately preceding the renewed war with the Syrians, had, as we see from the story before us, borne no fruit. His attitude towards Jehovah and his covenant remained the same. There is not a sign of any change of heart. He is now enraged against Benhadad, whom, after the battle of Aphek, he called his "brother," and suffered to depart out of weakness and vanity. He summons the chief soldiers to a war against Benhadad, and calls for Jehoshaphat's aid also, in order to make sure of destroying him. As Jehoshaphat desired, before engaging on the expedition, to hear an oracle of Jehovah in regard to it, Ahab summoned only those in regard to whose declarations he could be sure they would accord with his own wishes; and when Micaiah, being called at the express wish of Jehoshaphat, gives another prophetic declaration, Ahab explains this as the expression of personal malice, as he had once done in regard to Elijah's declarations (ch. xxi. 20). He allows Zedekiah to insult and abuse Micaiah, and even orders the latter into close confinement. Then, again, he becomes alarmed at the prophet's words, though before he was passionate and excited; and he goes into battle disguised.—*Lange.*

Verses 1-4. National alliances. 1. Are justifiable against a dangerous and powerful enemy. 2. Are always attended with peril where there is want of harmony in religious beliefs. 3. Cannot result in permanent good without the Divine blessing.

Verse 3. It is a misfortune when great men have a fondness for war. They are not satisfied when they must be still, but seek war without necessity, and imperil their country. Do ye not know that heaven is ours, yet we be still! So should those cry out to their hearers who are charged with the cure of souls, and should encourage them to take the kingdom of heaven by force (Matt. xi. 12).—*Wurt. Summ.*

Verses 5-12. The delusion of falsehood. I. All the more dangerous when it is the consentaneous declaration of acknowledged religious leaders (verses 6, 12). II. Never lacks an audacious and ingenious champion (verse 11). III. Meanly obsequious in the presence of royal pomp and circumstance (verse 10). IV. Fears exposure from the tongue of the faithful (verse 8). V. Is ever suspected by the truly good (verses 5, 7).

Verse 7. Their number consent; confidence hath easily won credit with Ahab: we do all willingly believe what we wish. Jehoshaphat is not so soon satisfied. These prophets were, it is like, obtruded to him for the true prophets of the true God. The judicious king sees cause to suspect them, and now, perceiving at what altars they served, hates to rest in their testimony. "Is there nowhere a prophet of the Lord besides?" One single prophet speaking from the oracles of God is worth more than four hundred Baalites. Truth may not ever be measured by the poll. It is not number, but weight, that must carry it in a council of prophets. A solid verity in one mouth is worthy to preponderate light falsehood in a thousand.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 10-12. There is nothing that is more sinful and worthy of punishment than to flatter the great, who need to hear the truth. This is more sinful, however, in the clergy than in others. Who is not disgusted by those who fashion their words by popular favour? Yet he who would go on smoothly, easily, and prosperously must do this. Then he will not meet

with opposition, nor lose his place at Jezebel's table, nor his other emoluments. All the four hundred agreed unanimously, and yet their prophecy was false. In matters of Divine truth it matters not how many agree. Here voices ought to be weighed, not counted. The number of the unbelieving or the superstitious was always greater than that of the believers, for men agree in error or falsehood much more easily than in truth. Be not deceived, though thousands may think and say the same thing, and though the greatest and most learned may be amongst them; but cling thou to the word of Him who said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away." Unanimity of opinion, even in the largest congregations of theologians, is not always a proof of truth, for a great company may err.—*Lange.*

Verses 12-28. Here we see the marks of the true and false prophets. The false teachers say what is popular, so as to enjoy rewards; they rely upon their numbers; they say that they have God's Word, though they have it not, and claim to be in all things equal to the true teachers; they dispute more with blows and screams than with proofs from the Word of God; they are held in high esteem. On the contrary, true teachers do not speak to please anybody, but they preach fearlessly the truth of God's Word, letting it strike whom it will, refusing to be turned aside and submitting to persecution.—*Wurt. Summ.*

Verse 12. These were fit helves for such a hatchet as Ahab was; fit lettuce for such lips. Itching ears shall have clawing preachers.—*Trapp.*

Verses 13-28. **The intrepidity of truth.** I. Is superior to the influence of bribery (verses 13, 14). II. Teaches when to use judiciously the weapon of irony (verses 15, 16). III. Fearlessly declares what is divinely revealed, irrespective of consequences (verses 17, 18). IV. Is explicit and uncompromising in the exposure of falsehood (verses 19-23). V. Refuses to be silent, though threatened and afflicted with severest sufferings (verses 24-28).

Verses 19-23. **Heavenly visions.** I. Present sublime and elevating revelations of truth. II. Sustain and strengthen the suffering faithful. III. Are intended to guide and instruct in a crisis of national and religious difficulty. IV. Aggravate national ruin when wilfully disregarded.

Verse 22. The difficulties which attach to this passage are considerable. While, on the one hand, it is hard to suppose that one of the holy angels would undertake to be, and be permitted to be, a "lying spirit," on the other, it is not what we should have expected, to find Satan, or an evil spirit, included among the host of heaven (verse 19), and acting as the minister of God. Still, as Satan appears sometimes to present himself to God among the angels (Job. i. 6; ii. 1), he may have done so on this occasion; and the service which he offered may have been accepted. On the other hand, we scarcely know enough of the Divine government in its action upon evil to say that the holy angels may not sometimes be employed, when God "sends men strong delusion that they should believe a lie" (1 Thess. ii. 12). Finally, it may be doubted whether we ought to take literally, and seek to interpret exactly, each statement of the present narrative. Visions of the invisible world can only be a sort of parables; revelations, not of the truth as it actually is, but of so much of the truth as can be shown through such a medium. The details of a vision, therefore, cannot safely be pressed, any more than the details of a parable. Portions of each must be accommodations to human modes of thought, and may very inadequately express the realities which they are employed to shadow forth to us.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 28. These men called prophets were only pretenders to prophecy, whom the wicked king of Israel had in his pay, and who knew how to suit

his humour and flatter his vanity. Micaiah distinctly calls them Ahab's prophets. The address of Micaiah is not a real representation of anything done in the heavenly world, as if the Almighty were at a loss for expedients, or had any hand in the sins of his creatures. It is a parable, and tells in figurative language the events shortly to take place, and the permission on the part of God for these agents to act. It is a known idiom of the Hebrew language to express things in an imperative and active form which are to be understood only permissively. —*T. H. Horne.*

Verses 24-28. **Micaiah's suffering for the truth.** 1. He is publicly insulted by Zedekiah, the chief of the prophets (Matt. v. 11). 2. He is thrown into prison by the godless king Ahab (1 Pet. ii. 19). 3. He is left unprotected by the pious king Jehoshaphat (Matt. xxvi. 56).

Verses 26-28. **Ahab's conduct towards the witness of the truth.** I. *It was tyrannical.* There is no greater tyranny than to suppress by force the Divine Word and the truth. II. *It was foolish.* We cannot accomplish anything against the truth (2 Cor. xiii. 8). We can put the advocates of it in prison, but not the truth. It cannot be bound in chains, nor starved. It escapes and spreads, and only gains in glory by our attempts to oppress it.—*Lange.*

Verse 26. To prison, whence he was fetched, and whereof he might say, as that martyr did to the bishop who reviled and threatened him: Send me back to my frogs and toads, where I may be free to pray for your lordship.

Verse. 27. This is the emphatic clause of Ahab's speech. Micaiah is to be once more put in prison, but not on the same terms as before. In order to punish him for his uncomplying spirit, he is to be placed upon a poorer and scantier diet than he had been previously allowed; and this is to continue until Ahab returns *in peace.* Ahab introduces this expression purposely, in order to show his entire disbelief of Micaiah's prophecy.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 28. The hope of unjust men perisheth (Prov. xi. 7). Julian, for instance, when he went out to war against the Persians, breathed out threatenings against the Christians on his return, which was never. And that French king who promised to see with his eyes a certain female martyr burnt, had, before that time, one of his eyes thrust out at the jousts, of which wound he died.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 29-40.

The Death of a Wicked King.

I. **That the death of a wicked king may be precipitated by an unbelieving disregard of divine warnings** (verse 29 compare with verses 17-23). 1. *A wicked king is not indifferent to human threats* (verses 30, 31). It is very likely that Ahab had heard, through the agency of his spies, of the order of the Syrian king for his charioteers to fight only with the king of Israel, and this had more effect upon him than the warning words of Micaiah, though he might regard them as an evil omen. To baffle the object of Benhadad, and perhaps with a secret wish to prove the words of Micaiah false, Ahab disguised himself. A wicked man is often more easily scared by the bluster and bullying of a weak, sinful, human creature, than by the threatenings of heaven. 2. *A wicked king is reckless as to the danger in which he exposes his ally* (verses 32, 33). Jehoshaphat in his kingly robes was mistaken for the king of Israel, and very nearly fell a victim to the Syrian fury.

He cried to Heaven for help (2 Chron. xviii. 31), perhaps using his own peculiar battle cry, which, as it contained the name of Jehovah, would be distinct from that of Ahab's, and was probably known to the Syrians. Jehoshaphat now sees to his sorrow the great inconvenience of being in bad company; and that green wood also, if bound up with dry, easily takes fire and they burn together. Selfishness is the essence of wickedness; so that the sinner himself escapes, it matters little to him what may become of his companions.

II. That the death of a wicked king may be brought about by what seems the merest accident. 1. *He may meet death with a princely fortitude* (verses 34, 35). An archer shoots an arrow in the air, little dreaming what mischief it will work; it is the death warrant of the king of Israel. Feeling himself mortally wounded, he directed his chariot to be quietly driven aside that he might have his wounds dressed; and then returned to the battle, supported in his chariot in sight of his army until the sunset, when he expired. Let us give Ahab full credit for whatever was commendable in his conduct. Bad as he was, there was a touch of true heroism in the brave, resolute manner in which he insisted on being stayed up in his chariot, while his life-blood flowed about his feet, and his wound festered under the irritating heat of the sun. His death was kingly, and became him better than his life. 2. *His death decides the fate of an important expedition* (verse 36). The attack on the Syrians was abandoned and the army dispersed, according to the custom of the Orientals on the death of the king. Death interrupts the work of the wicked, and in some cases happily ends it. The decease of a wicked ruler is an opportunity for the reform of national abuses.

III. That the death of a wicked king was accomplished in a manner that fulfilled the disregarded warnings of heaven (verse 38). The manner of Ahab's end left its traces in a form not to be mistaken. The blood which all through that day had been flowing from his wound had covered both the armour in which he was dressed and the chariot in which he had stood for so many hours. The chariot, perhaps the armour, was washed in state—according to one version in the tank of Samaria, according to another in the spring of Jezreel. The bystanders remembered that the blood, shed as it had been on the distant battle field, streamed into the same waters which had been polluted by the blood of Naboth and his sons, and was lapped up from the margin by the same dogs and swine, still prowling round the spot; and that when the abandoned outcasts of the city—probably those who had assisted in the profligate rites of the temple of Ashtaroth—came, according to their shameless usage, for their morning bath in the pool, they found it red with the blood of the first apostate king of Israel. So were accomplished the warnings of Elijah and Micaiah. So ended what may be called the first part of the tragedy of the House of Omri (*Stanley*). What would be the thoughts of the dying king that day on the battle field? Already he had proof of the fulfilment of one of Micaiah's warnings regarding himself, and perhaps sullenly anticipated that the rest would follow. With what horror would he reflect upon his wicked life—the warnings he had slighted, the idolatry he had committed and championed, the stolen vineyard of Naboth, the heartless imprisonment of Micaiah! If we reject the warnings of heaven, we shall not prevent their accomplishment. The apparent delay affords time for repentance, and is not to be mistaken for indiscriminate leniency or forgetfulness.

IV. That the death of a wicked king was the more striking and humiliating that it occurred in the midst of external magnificence and power (verses 39, 40). All that Ahab lived for—affluence, pomp, pleasure—was taken away in a moment. The ivory house—a rival of the stately palace of

the kings of Judah—the fortified and prosperous cities he had reared, the ease and gaiety of his luxurious court, must be abandoned for ever; and what would he get in exchange? Death is no respecter of persons or circumstances. The mortal scythe is master of the royal sceptre. What will riches, magnificent monuments, or heroic deeds avail when God requires the sinner's soul? A wicked life does not *pay*.

LESSONS:—1. *Royalty is no defence against the havoc of death.* 2. *A wicked life will be cut short by an ignominious end.* 3. *A monarch who has lived for himself will perish unregretted.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 29-40. Ahab's end was truly tragical. It was brought about, not by a blind fate, but by a God who is just in His ways and holy in all His works (Psa. cxlv. 17), whose judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out (Rom. xi. 33). The conflict which Ahab had sought, and which no warning could induce him to abandon, became his punishment. He fell in battle with that very enemy who had once been delivered into his hands, and whom he had released out of vanity and weakness, to the harm of Israel; and so he made good the words of the prophet (ch. xx. 42). He thought that a disguise would render him secure from the Syrian leaders who sought to find him out, and he did, indeed, escape them; but an unknown man, who did not know him and had no intention against him, shot him, while Jeshoshaphat, though undisguised, escaped unharmed. The arrow which struck him was not warded off by his corselet, but just struck the narrow opening between the corselet and the skirt, where it could penetrate and inflict a fatal wound. Everyone, therefore, who does not regard all incidents as accidents, must recognize the hand which guided the shaft. The words of the psalmist held true—"If he will not turn, he will whet his sword, he hath bent his bow and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors" (Psa. vii. 12, 13). Finally, Ahab did not die at once, but at evening, in consequence of the loss of blood. His blood flowed down in the chariot, which was so besmeared by it that it had to be washed. It was washed at the pool before the city, where dogs drank and harlots bathed. So it came to pass, although he was buried with all honour, that he was marked in his death as one condemned by God, and Elijah's word was fulfilled (ch. xxi. 19).—*Lange.*

Verse 29. It might have been expected that Jehoshaphat, who had pressed enquiry at the Word of the Lord, and had not rested till a real prophet of Jehovah was sent for and made his appearance, would have withdrawn from the expedition when he heard Micaiah denounce it as fated to end in disaster. It must be remembered, however, that he had rashly committed himself to take part in the war by a solemn promise, couched in the strongest terms (v. 4), *before* he bethought himself of enquiring what was the will of God in the matter. His honour was thus pledged, and he would be ashamed to draw back, especially as Ahab, whom the prophecy chiefly threatened, was resolved to brave it. He may also have had a personal affection for Ahab, and so have been loth to desert him in his need. This seems to be implied in the rebuke addressed to him by the prophet Jehu after his return to Jerusalem—"Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and *love* them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (2 Chron. xix. 2).—*Speaker's Comm.*

— Men do far too readily what

they want to do, although it is contrary to God's will, putting aside God's Word, or the warnings of others, or the voice of conscience. The event was never good. How often men ask for advice, yet follow their own will only! Jehoshaphat's example ought to make us shy of the society of the wicked. The sun of grace in his heart became gradually dimmed. At first he had courage to remonstrate with Ahab, but gradually he comes to silence and indifference, even while Micaiah is abused and remanded to prison. In the end this evil companionship would have cost him his life, if God had not wonderfully interposed.—*Kyburn.*

Verse 30. The vanity of disguise. I. An evidence of cowardice and fear. II. Easily penetrated by the eye of the Omniscient Judge. III. Does not prevent the catastrophe it seeks to avoid.

— Unbelief in Ahab joined hands with superstition. The king despises and rejects the Word of God which is announced to him, and yet he is frightened, and seeks to escape the threatened dangers by disguising himself. This stratagem was intended to prove the prophet false. Neither cunning nor might avails against God's will. Thou mayest disguise thyself as thou wilt: God will find thee when and where no man recognises thee (Psa. cxxxix. 7-12).

Verse 31. The king of Syria gives charge to his captains to fight against none but the king of Israel. Thus doth the unthankful infidel repay the mercy of his late victor; ill was the snake saved that requites the favour of his life with a sting: thus still the greatest are the fairest mark to envious eyes. By how much more eminent any man is in the Israel of God, so many more and more dangerous enemies must he expect: both earth and hell conspire in their opposition to the worthiest. Those who are advanced above others have so much more need of the guard, both of their own vigilancy and others' prayers. Jehoshaphat had liked to have paid dear for his love: he is pursued for him in whose amity he offended; his cries deliver him—his cries, not to his pursuers, but to his God, whose mercy takes not advantage of our infirmity, but rescues us from those evils which we wilfully provoke. It is Ahab against whom, not the Syrians only, but for himself intends this quarrel; the enemy is taken off from Jehoshaphat.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 34. The greatest calamities. I. Often brought about by undesigned and accidental causes. II. Often occur to those who have taken the greatest pains to avoid them. III. May be traced to the unerring operations of retributive justice.

— The less of the human there is in those things which we commonly call accidents, the more there is of the Divine. The weal or woe of whole nations often depends on those things which are called accidents.

— O the just and mighty hand of that Divine providence which directeth all our actions to His own ends, which takes order where every shaft shall light, and guides the arrow of the strong archer into the joints of Ahab's harness! It was shot at a venture, falls by a destiny; and there falls where it may carry death to a hidden debtor. In all actions, both voluntary and casual, thy will, O God, shall be done by us, with whatever intentions. Little did the Syrian know whom he had stricken, no more than the arrow with which he struck. An invisible hand disposeth of both, to the punishment of Ahab, to the vindication of Micaiah. How worthily, O God, art thou to be adored in thy justice and wisdom! to be feared in thy judgments! Too late doth Ahab now think of the fair warnings of Micaiah, which he unwisely condemned; of the painful flatteries of Zedekiah, which he stubbornly believed. That guilty blood of his runs down out of his wound into the midst of his chariot, and pays Naboth his arrearages.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 37-40. O Ahab, what art thou the better for thine ivory house, while

thou hast a black soul? What comfort has thou now in those flattering prophets which tickled thine ears and secured thee of victories? What joy is it to thee now that thou wast great? Who had not rather be Micaiah in the jail, than Ahab in the chariot? Wicked men have the advantage of the way; godly men of the end. The chariot is washed in the pool of Samaria; the dogs come to claim their due; they lick up the blood of the great king of Israel. The tongues of those brute creatures shall make good the tongue of God's prophet. Micaiah is justified, Naboth is revenged, the Baalites confounded, Ahab judged. "Righteous art thou, O God, in all thy ways, and holy in all thy works"!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 37. And now God was even with him for his idolatry, persecution of the prophets, cruelty to Naboth, who now was in far better condition, likely. The wicked are like hawks, of great esteem while living, but after, nothing worth. The godly are compared to tamer fowls, which are hushed forth and little heeded whilst living; but after death are brought into the parlour. Then, there is as much difference as betwixt the falcon and the capon, the hawk and the hen.—*Trapp.*

Verses 37, 38. The death of Ahab. 1. *It was sudden* (1 Sam. xx. 3; Luke xii. 20). From sudden death, good Lord, deliver us. 2. *It was unrepentant.* Without conviction of sin, or repentance for it, or longing for grace and pardon. 3. *It was shameful.* He was indeed buried with honour, like the rich man (Luke xvi.); but the dogs licked his blood, and his memory does not remain in honour (Ps. lxxiii. 19; therefore, Ps. xc. 12; xxxix. 5). As he lived, so he died; as he died, so he was judged. The death of Ahab is a testimony to Rom. xi. 33; Gal. vi. 7; Isa. xl. 8.—*Lange.*

Verse 38. The inexorable law of retribution. 1. Is proportioned to the character and degree of the sin it punishes. 2. Is the terrible completion of the warnings and threatenings which foreshadowed it. 3. A proof of the unchanging justice of Jehovah. 4. An awful yet salutary method of instruction to all nations in all ages.

— From a narrative like this, it need scarcely be said, the stern justice of God may well be engraven on every heart. The examples we have of retributive providence in sacred Scripture are, to say the least, exceedingly striking. Judas hanged himself. Herod the Great, who slew the children of Bethlehem, was smitten with ulcers, from which issued swarms of loathsome vermin, and died in the greatest agony; a humbling spectacle to his meanest slave. Herod Agrippa, who permitted his fawning parasites to adore him as God, "was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost." The other Herod, who sent and beheaded the Baptist, spent his closing years with his guilty partner an exile in Lyons; while Salome, who asked the Baptist's head in a charger, met with her death, as related by Nicephorus, at the hand of a common assassin. Let examples such as these stand alongside of Ahab, to teach that even in *this* world these awful words have frequently an awful meaning: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."—*Howat.*

Verse 39. Nothing is known of these cities; but the fact of Ahab's building cities is important, as indicating the general prosperity of the country in his time, and his own activity as a ruler. The close relations which he established with Phœnicia and Judea tended naturally to bring about a flourishing condition of things in Samaria; and thus the decay of religion was accompanied by a temporary increase in the material prosperity (2 Kings iii. 4), the commercial enterprize (verse 49), and even the military vigour of the country. Such prosperity, it is plain, may for awhile co-exist with causes which are sapping the vital power of a nation, and leading it surely, if slowly, to destruction.—*Speaker's Comm.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 41-50.

THE PRAISEWORTHY EFFORTS OF A GOOD KING.

An agreeable change comes across the character of the history—like a wavering stream of light which silvers and beautifies the dark and restless sea. The last seven chapters have been wholly occupied with the history of the kingdom of Israel; a dismal record of defection, idolatry, bloodshed, ever intensifying wickedness, and of terrible judgments. Here we have interposed, as if to relieve the blackness of the picture, a brief epitome of the career of the good Jehoshaphat. For a fuller account of his reign consult 2 Chron. xvii.-xx. In the paragraph before us we have a representation of *the praiseworthy efforts of a good king.*

I. He is solicitous to maintain the religious prestige of the nation (verse 43). 1. *He follows the example of the good.* "He walked in all the ways of Asa, his father, he turned not aside from it." On the general piety of Asa see ch. xv. 11-15, and compare 2 Chron. xiv. 2-5; xv. 8-17. Jehosphaphat seems to have been a still better king, for he did not, like Asa, fall away in his old age (2 Chron. xvi. 2-12). It is an unspeakable advantage to have an early pious training; and to have constantly in view the best patterns of religious excellence to imitate. 2. *He strives after personal righteousness.* "Doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord." Goodness should be sought and practised for its own sake, and with a sincere desire to please God. Nothing is good which will not bear the test of the Divine scrutiny—which is not right in the eyes of the Lord." 3. *He may not accomplish all the religious reforms he desires.* "Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away." The only faults with which Jehoshaphat is charged are his allowance of the high places, and his tenderness towards the house of Ahab, which led him, first, to take a wife for his eldest son from among Ahab's daughters, and then to join both him and his successor in their military and other enterprises (1 Kings xxii. 29; 2 Kings iii. 7; 2 Chron. xx. 35-37). There are few reformers who do not make some mistakes; and few who accomplish all at which they aim. Even to *attempt* a great and noble enterprise has an elevating moral influence on the zealous reformer. It is one of the first and highest duties of a king to look well after the religious condition of his people.

II. He labours to promote peace (verse 44). For sixty years, from the first separation of the two kingdoms down to the accession of Jehoshaphat, there was an uninterrupted series of wars between Israel and Judah. This fratricidal policy was ended by the declaration of a formal peace, which was perhaps at once cemented by a marriage between the two children of the contracting parties, Jehoram and Athaliah. A wise and judicious king will use all legitimate means to promote and maintain an honourable peace, without the surrender of any one essential right, or the least sacrifice of dignity.

III. He is alive to the importance of a judicious manifestation of kingly power (verse 45). "His might that he showed and how he warred." He tries to promote peaceful relations with other nations, not because he is weak, but because he is strong! He discourages war in others by being always prepared for it himself. He will not suffer his authority to be despised, nor will he allow a wrong to his nation to go unpunished. Government that is not backed with power will soon drift into rebellion and anarchy.

IV. He is anxious about the morality of his people (verse 46). Sensual indulgence grows into still more abominable enormities, the more it is practised and tolerated. It saps the foundations of national life and morality. Much had

been done to root out the wretched class referred to in this verse (ch. xv. 12); but the evil was so inveterate and deep-seated that it could not be all at once extinguished. An examination of the social life of the Greeks and Romans when at the acme of their national greatness shows how possible it is for the most brilliant attainments in literature, science, and art, to co-exist alongside the most debasing and shameless immorality. Christianity is the apostle and donor of the highest and purest morality.

V. He encourages the exercise of good government. "There was then no king in Edom: a deputy was king" (verse 47). The last reference to Edom was in the time of Solomon, when Hadad, having returned thither from Egypt, was "an adversary unto Solomon" (ch. xi. 14), and reigned over Egypt. It seems to have been again reduced, and to be dependent on the kingdom of Judah, being governed by a deputy, or viceroy, who, however, was allowed the royal title. This government of dependencies by means of subject kings was the all but universal practice in the East down to the time of Cyrus. A good king is careful to provide effective government in every part of his dominions. When the government is feeble, every other interest suffers.

VI. He seeks to advance commercial enterprise (verses 48, 49). Jehoshaphat sought to re-establish the maritime trade to Ophir, which had proved such a source of wealth in Solomon's reign; and, though the shipbuilding in this instance proved a failure, it illustrates the active desire of the king to promote the commercial welfare of the nation. The ships were wrecked while in the harbour, because they were badly built, the Jewish sailors having but an imperfect knowledge of the sea and of the rig and management of ships; or, according to the prophet Eliezer, as a Divine judgment against Jehoshaphat for joining himself with the idolatrous Ahaziah in this business (2 Chron. xx. 36, 37). The commercial genius of Jehoshaphat would find scope in other directions, which would all tend to increase the national prosperity. If commerce is stifled, the nation is starved. "Every profession implies system. The meanest trade demands it, and would run to waste without something of it. The marvellous achievements of modern commerce, stretching its relations over distant seas and many lands, and gathering the materials of every civilization within its ample bosom, are, more than anything, the result of an expanding and victorious system, which shrinks at no obstacles and adapts itself to every emergency." A good king readily appreciates the application of system to commercial success, and is not too proud or too indifferent to act accordingly.

VII. He transmits a heritage of good to his successor (verse 50). Jehoram enters upon the government with all the advantages of his father's achievements and prestige. Fortunate indeed is the youthful king who succeeds a provident and far-seeing father; and who has before him, as a constant inspiration, the example of a holy and useful life. To leave a good name to posterity is better than riches. It is a solemn and sacred trust to receive all that Jehoram received. It may be shamefully abused, as, alas! it was in his case (2 Chron. xxi. 6).

LESSONS:—1. *A crown brings great opportunities and great responsibilities.* 2. *The best king cannot accomplish all the good he would.* 3. *A good man is honoured for the good he attempted, as well as for what he actually accomplished*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 41-50. The reign of Jehoshaphat was a very successful and prosperous one for Judah, both internally and externally. The author does not enter more particularly into the details of its history, evidently because, from the

time of the division of the kingdom, his main object was rather to give a representation of the monarchy in Israel until its downfall. Jehoshaphat's aim, after he had established legal order in his dominions as far as possible, reduced the neighbouring people to subjection again, and concluded peace with the brother kingdom, was to restore the times of prosperity that existed in the days of Solomon, and to bring his kingdom up to the height of that of Solomon once more. The glory of the kingdom, however, as it had existed under Solomon, was, according to the purpose of God, for ever gone by. Its return was not a part of the divine plan of salvation, and every human attempt to restore it must necessarily fail. The fleet of Jehoshaphat went down in the harbour of Ezion-geber, even before it had sailed out, and that, too, not by human fault, but by a storm—that is to say, by a dispensation of God.—*Lange.*

— All Christian rulers and governors ought to follow the example of the pious king Jehoshaphat—to do what is pleasing to God, to walk in His ways without departing from them, to maintain and extend pure religon, to remove and destroy what is evil, and especially not to permit whoredom, but with earnestness to do away with it and punish it, and to guard themselves from having too much intercourse with godless persons, or from entering into any covenant with them, because this leads to no good, as indeed Jehoshaphat got only danger and loss by it. Every one should profit by the life experience of Jehoshaphat. All that he undertook according to God's word and will went on fortunately, and attained good success, and was attended with blessing; but all that he undertook in conjunction with Ahab and Ahaziah turned out unfortunately: there was no blessing upon that.—*Wurt. Summ.*

Verse. 43. **An upright life.** 1. Is modelled after a worthy pattern. 2. Is marked by fidelity and perseverance 3. Is approved and owned of God. 4 May not be free from some imperfections.

Verses. 48-49. **The risks of commerce.** 1. Demand great toil and enterprise. 2. Liable to great losses. 3. May be involved in unfortunate partnerships. 4. Cultivate decision of character: "Jehoshaphat would not" (verse 49).

Verse 48. **"For his ships were broken."** This cross was in great mercy to Jehoshaphat. "Thou in very faithfulness hast afflicted me," said David. This should be a *patrenting* consideration; as it is said to have been to Philip of Spain, upon the defeating and scattering of his navy in 1588. He gave, and commanded to be given all over Spain, thanks to God that the loss was no more grievous; and used singular mercy in relieving the distressed soldiers and sailors—*Trapp.*

Verses 49-50. **The heart of man** proposes its own way, but the Lord alone allows it to proceed therein (Prov. xvi. 9). He often confounds our purposes and destroys our plans which reach so far and so high, that we may not become puffed up, but learn to yield to His holy will, and to say: "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."—What God has clearly destroyed as a punishment, that let us not build up again at the counsel or demand of any man, for when He breaks in pieces, it cannot avail to build again (Job. xii. 14).—So Jehoshaphat would not build again. The offers of a man who had departed from God, even if he offer thee ever so much profit and pleasantness, do thou reject with determined will.—*Lange*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 51-53.

The Power of Evil to Perpetuate Itself.

I. **That evil perpetuates itself by the force of parental training and example** (verse 52). Ahaziah was cursed with a wicked ancestry. The evil wrought by a wicked father may be counteracted by the influences of a pious

mother, or *vice versa*. But where both father and mother are morally bad, and especially where the mother is the superior genius, no wonder that the worst features of their characters are reproduced and perpetuated in their children. It is a fearful calamity for children to be born of the ignorant, the idolatrous, the vicious. Parents have much to answer for who train up their offspring in sin. It is said that Plato, seeing a child doing mischief in the street, went forth and corrected his father for it.

II. That evil perpetuates itself when it is individually sanctioned and practised. "For he served Baal, and worshipped him" (verse 53). Ahaziah made the sin of his parents his own, by his own free, voluntary act. He rejected the God of Elijah, of Micaiah, and of Jehoshaphat, of whom he must have heard, and he elected to serve Baal and worship him. He threw all the weight of his kingly authority on the side of the national idol. Evil is strengthened and extended by the independent action of every additional votary.

III. That the perpetuation of evil is offensive to God. "Provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done" (verse 53). Sin is not unnoticed, nor will it long go unpunished. Every act of iniquity provokes the Divine anger, and though God is slow to wrath and reluctant to punish, the day is approaching when terrible and complete vengeance will overtake the evildoer. The judgment which fell on the house of Ahab is a signal example of the ultimate fate of the impenitent wicked.

LESSONS:—1. *Parents are responsible for the moral condition of their children.* 2. *Sin is a germ that has the alarming power of propagating itself.* 3. *Evil, though powerful, is not omnipotent, nor will it for ever triumph.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 51-53. As regards his relation to Jehovah, which was the main point for every Israelitish king, Ahaziah was one of the very worst of them. This is marked, in the general description, by the fact that it is said of him, not only that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord," and "walked in the ways of Jeroboam," but that it is also added, "in the way of his father," nay, even also, which is observed of no other king, "in the way of his mother," the fanatical, idolatrous, and bloodthirsty Jezebel, who was still living, and perhaps controlled him even more than she had controlled his father. All the acts of God during the reign of his father, of which he had been eye-witness and ear-witness, the proofs of God's power, long-suffering, and justice, even the tragical end of Ahab, had made no impression upon him. All had passed by him, and left no effect behind. For this very reason, then, in the first place, he is worse than Ahab.—*Lange.*

Verse 52. The curse of ancestral iniquity. I. Is ever displeasing to God. II. Pollutes succeeding generations. III. Is aggravated by voluntary adoption and individual practice of iniquity.

— It is bad enough, indeed, when one or the other of one's parents is godless, but how much more when neither fears God? How can we hope for the good nurture of children in that case? The power of example is not greater in any relation than in that of parents to children. The way in which the father or mother walks has more influence upon the children than all the doctrines and teachings which they give them. It is not praiseworthy, nor a thing for which one can satisfactorily answer before God, if the parents and ancestors have been godless, or the adherents of a false religion, that the children should do the same, and follow in their footsteps. It will not suffice before God to say, "I believe what my parents and ancestors believed. They were of this religion, and I will not believe that they have been damned."—*Wurt. Summ.*

SECOND BOOK OF KINGS.

CHAPTER I.

THE SICKNESS AND DEATH OF AHAZIAH.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Then Moab rebelled**—Since the time of David the Moabites had been tributary to Israel (2 Sam. viii. 2; xxiii. 20). On the death of Ahab and accession of Ahaziah (1 Kings xxii. 51) they revolted and cast off the yoke. Verse 2. **And Ahaziah fell down, &c.**—This accident prevented his attempting to suppress the revolt. **Through the lattice**—הַשְּׁבָכָה—Either the wooden *parapet* (or fence) running round the flat roof, and which probably gave way as Ahaziah leaned over it; or a latticed *skylight* in the roof itself, and which broke under him when he heedlessly stepped upon it. The latter is most probable (and the Rabbins so regard it), for he fell into "his upper chamber." The 'lattice" may have been the roof window of this chamber. **Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron**—בַּעַל זְבוּב—No other mention in the Old Testament of Baal-zebub. The name means the fly-Baal. *Sept.* Βααλ μυῖαν. The fly-god, regarded by expositors either as the "defender against flies," and also the "fly-god," an idol in the form of a fly. *Ekron*—probably the present Akir, nearest Samaria, of the five northern Philistian cities (Joshua xiii. 3). Verse 3. **But the angel of the Lord said**—Such consultation of "a god" violated a fundamental law of the theocracy (Ex. xx. 3; Deut. v. 7), and deliberately repudiated Jehovah. Verse 6. **There came a man up to meet us**—The messengers did not recognize Elijah, yet they were so impressed by his words—"his authoritative tone, commanding attitude, and affecting message" (*Jamieson*)—as to return instantly to the king. Verse 8. **He was a hairy man**—Not meaning that he wore long locks and a flowing beard; nor that his whole person was, as Esau's, hairy; but that he was robed in a coarse hair garment (of sheep or goat skin, or of camel's hair). Elijah originated this distinctive attire, which became henceforth the mark of the prophets as preachers of repentance. This stern, rough garb was worn not as an act of mere asceticism, but as a symbol of sorrow over the people's iniquities and the impending judgments of God. **A girdle of leather**—This אֵזוֹר עוֹר was the ζώνη δερματίνη (Matt. iii. 4) of John the Baptist. The leather girdle was symbolic of self-denial and contempt for indulgencies; the ordinary girdle of Hebrews being fine linen or more costly materials elegantly embroidered. Verse 9. Captain of fifty with his fifty—The army was divided into sections of 1,000, 100, and 50, and each had its own leader (Numb. xxxi. 14, 48; 1 Sam. viii. 12). **He sat on the top of an hill**—probably on Carmel (see ii. 25; 1 Kings xviii. 42). **Thou man of God!**—This name was used in contemptuous irony, and thus the captains abetted the insolence of the king towards Jehovah, whose prophet Elijah was. Verse 10. **If I *be* a man of God, then let fire, &c**—Elijah invoked proof of his having Divine authority for his message in the form of a judgment upon them from the God they dared to insult. The destructive fire was both proof and punishment in one. Verse 11. **Come down quickly**—Greater audacity still in this demand—רְדָה מְהֵרָה—as if he were fortified with irresistible authority. Verse 13. **A captain of the third fifty**—The second captain learned no awe from the fate of his predecessor, but showed more obstinacy and daring; but the *third*, though commissioned by the still wilful and wicked king, came with a changed attitude and tone. Verse 15. **And he arose, and went down with him unto the king**—He knew how Ahaziah would greet him with malice, and that his appearance before the king exposed him to perils, yet he fearlessly obeyed God's command. Verse 17. **And Jehoram reigned**—This *Israel*-Jehoram is here said to have commenced his reign in the second year of the *Judah*-Jehoram; but in chap. iii. 1 he is said to have come to the throne in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat. It would therefore appear that Ahaziah reigned as regent during the seventeenth and the larger portion of the eighteenth years of Jehoshaphat, and that Jehoram (or Joram), Ahaziah's brother, succeeded to the throne in the end of Jehoshaphat's eighteenth year.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-18.

THE EXPOSURE AND PUNISHMENT OF IDOLATRY.

WE have seen that Ahaziah imbibed and adopted the idolatrous principles of his father; and we are now to learn that he also possessed the ferocious and God-defying spirit of his mother. A whole chapter is here devoted to the reign of Ahaziah; not because of its importance, for it was both brief and disastrous, but to expose the utter imbecility of the idolatry in which he trusted, and to show by what terrible judgment the honour of the insulted and forgotten God of Israel would be vindicated. The incidents of this chapter are also full of interest, as they are connected with the last public exercises of Elijah's prophetic office. The stern, fearless prophet is to the last what he has been from the beginning of his career—the messenger of wrath, the rebuker of iniquity, the prophet of fire. Observe—

I. That idolatry is a pitiable infatuation and a great crime. 1. *It is an atrocious insult to the one only true God.* By Ahaziah sending to a foreign divinity to seek help and counsel, he transgressed not only the general and chief commandment (Ex. xx. 3), but also the special commandment (Levit. xiv. 31; xx. 6, 27; Deut. xviii. 10, 11), which threatened with extermination those who questioned soothsayers and wizards. It was a public and practical declaration that he esteemed the fly-god of the Philistines above the living God of Israel, and it was a formal degradation and contempt of, and an insult to, Jehovah. Such a crime had not previously been committed by a king, and, if ever, then certainly now, the time was come for the zealous defender of the name of the God of Israel to emerge from his concealment and announce to the bold scoffer the Divine retribution. All idolatry is an insult to the majesty of heaven, and will not be allowed to pass unchallenged or unpunished. 2. *It is powerless to help in extremity.* Idolatry is purely a human creation, and is, therefore, imperfect and limited. While all goes well, the infatuated worshipper may be amused and satisfied with the delusion; but when trouble comes, then does he discover the vanity and helplessness of the imagination in which he had misplaced his confidence. The man who has forsaken God is without refuge in his distress. 3. *It is persisted in, notwithstanding affliction and threatened death.* Even the terrible announcement of Divine vengeance was not sufficient to humble the dying man, or to bring him to repentance; it rather embittered and filled him with anger, and even with plans of murder. All this he does while on his death bed, face to face with death, so completely has all reverence for what is sacred abandoned him, and been supplanted by a stubbornness and wilfulness which extend even to madness. Ahab humbled himself when Elijah announced to him the judgment of God (1 Kings xxi. 27). Even Jeroboam sent, when his son was sick, to the prophet Ahijah (1 Kings xiv. 2); but Ahaziah perseveres in his senseless perversity, and so falls far below both of these. There is no infatuation so hopeless and insensate as the infatuation of idolatry.

II. That the vanity of idolatry is repeatedly exposed. 1. *By its own failures.* The scene on Mount Carmel, and the public failure there, could not be forgotten. In all ages and under all circumstances idolatry has been a gigantic failure, notwithstanding its bombastic pretensions and colossal and imposing proportions. It fails to meet the deepest needs of man, and retards the development and progress of the race. 2. *It is exposed by Divinely commissioned messengers.* Its enormities have been confronted and denounced by an Elijah. Such work needed a man divinely endowed with fiery strength and

with a fiery tongue. His weighty, irresistible personality, and his forcible, energetic speech, made such an impression on the messengers of the king that they did not dare to carry out the orders of their despotic master, but turned back without further action. As always, so here also, when they sought to seize him and make him a prisoner, he was not to be reached: the emissaries came to disgrace. Without fear, courageous and unterrified, he appears before the king himself, as he had done before his father, and announces to the proud and stubborn man his approaching death. Elijah is the representative and instrument of the jealousy of the Divine Judge, the herald of the Divine retributive justice, and on that account the prototype of all the forerunners of the great and terrible day of judgment (*vide Lange*).

III. That idolatry is punished with terrible vengeance. 1. *By personal affliction* (verse 2). The same hand that guided Ahab's shaft cracks Ahaziah's lattice. How infinite variety of plagues hath the just God for obstinate sinners! Whether in the field or in the chamber, He knows to find them out. How fearlessly did Ahaziah walk on his wonted pavement! The Lord hath laid a trap for him whereinto, while he thinks least, he falls irrecoverably. No place is safe for the man that is at variance with God. Affliction has brought many to reflection and prayer who might have gone down to the grave impenitent and unforgiven. Suffering that does not soften, hardens the heart the more. 2. *By fearful and signal destruction* (verses 9-12). Fire comes down from heaven and consumes the insolent and idolatrous soldiers. What madness is it for him whose breath is in his nostrils to contend with the Almighty! The conduct of Elijah has been frequently censured. It is forgotten, however, that such censure is, in reality, directed, not against the inferior agent, but against God Himself. The facts were these, and it is important to ponder them well: As Israel's king, Ahaziah was bound by Israel's laws; in religion especially, the God of Abraham was the only divinity he should ever have known; to send to Baal-zebub was to this jealous God a great affront; to apprehend His prophet was open rebellion; nay, utter excision was stated, in the plainest language, to be the fate of all idol servers (Deut. vi. 14, 15). In harmony with this, therefore, our wonder should be, not that so many of the idolaters were slain, but that any one in the guilty land was ever suffered to go free. It was the last warning Elijah was permitted to give to the house of Ahab; and in every way it was rendered memorable. Even then it was not too late for Ahaziah to return; there was mercy wrapped in the dark sentence of doom. It was unheeded; and, stubbornly, fiercely clinging to his wretched idolatry, Ahaziah died! Some live long that they may aggravate their judgment; others die soon, that they may hasten it.

Lessons:—1. *It is the crime of idolatry that it ignores God.* 2. *Idolaters are sufficiently warned, and are therefore without excuse.* 3. *The wrath of God is directed, not against the idols, but against the idolaters.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-4. The judgment of idolatry. 1. Revolt (verse 1). 2. Affliction (verse 2). 3. Warning (verse 3). 4. Death (verse 4).

Verses 2-17. The folly of godlessness. 1. In the dark valley in which he must journey, he seizes, not upon the staff and support which could comfort him, but upon a stalk of straw; he makes a work of man's hands his consolation in life and in death: that is the height of folly. 2. He will hear nothing of death, and hates and persecutes him who reminds him of death: death comes, however;

it is inevitable. To avoid every thought of death, and to escape from everything which may remind us of it, is the greatest folly, for we must all depart sometime (Psa. xxxix. 5), and appear before Him who will give to each according to his deeds (Rom. ii. 6). 3. He sends soldiers against the prophet who announces to him the judgment of God, and thinks that he can thereby set aside the judgment itself. But to attempt to do away with the truth of God, and to accomplish something perforce against the decision of God by means of human power and might, is the greatest folly. —*Krummacher.*

Verse 2. By such mischance, besides diseases, men may be taken as a bird with a bolt, while he gazeth at the bow; which made Augustine say that he would not, for the gain of a million worlds, be an Atheist for one half hour, lest, in that time, death should seize him.

— Let us pause for a moment, and read, from the case of Ahaziah, the impressive lesson that all our care, forethought, and caution cannot ward off accident, calamity, and inexorable death. He who escaped the Syrian's venturous aim was laid low by an accidental fall from the platform of his palace in Samaria. He had probably been leaning against the screen or balustrade common on the tops of Eastern dwellings, when, overbalancing himself, the slender rail or lattice-work had given way. He fell on the tesselated pavement below, stunned and mangled, and he was carried to a couch from which he was never to rise. Age, character, rank, position, station can afford no exemption from such casualties, and from the last terminating event of all, the universal doom of dust. These royal robes encircled a body perishable as that of the meanest subject of his realm. The hand grasping that ivory sceptre, as well as the brawny arm of the strongest menial in his palace, must moulder to decay. "Trust not in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth. He returneth to his earth. In that very day his thoughts perish." Poor and rich, the beggar and the prince, the slave and his master, Dives with his purple and gold, and Lazarus with his crumbs and rags, are on a level here. The path of glory and royalty, of greatness and power, leads but to the grave. The lattice on which the strong man leans—the iron balustrade of full health and unbroken energy—may in a moment give way. Sudden accident or fever may, in a few hours, write Ichabod on a giant's strength. The touch of the old slave in the conqueror's triumphant car is never more needful than when we are moving through life, charioted in comforts, wreathed with garlands, regaled with music: "Remember thou art mortal." And when accident or evil does overtake, it is our comfort to know that it is by God's permission. It is He who puts the arrow on the bowman's string. It is He who loosens the balustrade in its sockets. It is He who makes the lightning leap from the clouds on its mortal errand. It is He who commissions the coral builders to rear the fatal reef. It is He who guides the roll of that destroying billow that has swept a loved one from the deck into a watery grave. Saddest of all is it when accident or sudden death overtake, without due preparation for the great change. How much nobler, wiser, happier, to anticipate the necessities of that inevitable hour, that whether our summons shall come by the fall from the lattice, or the gradual sinking and wasting of strength, we may be ready, in calm composure, to breathe the saying of the dying patriarch: "I have waited for thy salvation, O God!"—*Macduff.*

— "Enquire of the God of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease." Augury of the future. 1. Possible only to God. 2. Leads men to presumption and extravagance. 3. Highly offensive to God.

— Many lessons might be drawn from that darkened chamber where lies the son of Ahab, arrayed in the last robe he will ever need. We mention only one—the folly of men when they

forsake the ways of God, to pay homage to idols of any kind, or in hopeless attempt to unveil the future. As to the former, all the Ekrons of earth—whether pride of reason, or personal merit, or the general mercy of God—are only vanity and a snare; there is but one rock of hope, security, and strength, and that rock is Christ. As to the latter—the attempt to unveil the future—we know what Saul made of it in his visit to Endor, and we have seen what Ahaziah made of it in his proposed message to Ekron. The present is ours, the future is God's; let us be thankful and content. No doubt, at times, in anxious suspense, we should like a glimpse of the issue of certain affairs; but enough for our guidance, sufficient horoscope for all, that the great Bible principle is broadly set down: "He that soweth to the flesh," &c. There is only one God who can answer the question, whether put by Ahaziah or any one else, "Shall I recover of this disease?" And yet we live still in an age of divination. It were useless, it were false to deny it. Happily, not so much in this country, but in France to some, and in America to a fearful extent, we are told of all manner of ways whereby to communicate with the other world, and, from the revelations received, to regulate in this our conduct, present and future. *Spiritualism* is pursued as a science, believed as a creed. It has its learned societies, its weekly journals, its priestesses and priests, its thousands of educated and rapt devotees. "I would as soon think of doubting my own existence as call in question the facts of spiritualism," said a Unitarian minister from America. "Why, through means of it we have brought hundreds of infidels to believe in another world." We shall not go into the subject at length, but must be permitted to say, that we can never understand why spiritual revelations are made only in the dark, and why the presence of a determined sceptic is always unfavourable to the manifestations. We feel constrained to add, that while we believe, from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, that departed spirits do not forget their earthly history, that very parable assures us there is no possible mode for spirits, either good or bad, to communicate with the world they have left. Dives found it impossible, and hence desired Lazarus to *send* to his father's house; Abraham spoke of it as both unprecedented and impossible: "Neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Just men made perfect have other occupation than to be the tools of the *clairvoyant;* and lost spirits we may be sure are in no mood for such work. This revival of Pagan superstition would neither deserve mention nor serious refutation, were it not for the hold it is taking of the popular mind, especially in the United States, where we are amazed that a nation, so acute and quick-sighted in most other matters, should be juggled out of the truth of their English Bibles by raps upon tables, or the ridculous presagings of idle girls. Away with your *mediums*, their bandaged eyes and pencilled messages, hands waving in the air, and all the dark arts of this latest charlatanry, the most wretched and profane of all modern shams. God is His own interpreter; and neither to shrines at Ekron nor Boston, neither to Baalzebub nor Daniel Home, will He give the power of unlocking the destinies of men.—*Howat.*

— If a man has once torn himself away from the living God and His word, he does not, as infidelity pretends, become wiser and more enlightened, but only too often he becomes the prey of the most insipid and foolish superstition. How many do not believe in a holy, omniscient, and just God, to whom they must give an account of all they do and leave undone, but, on the contrary, in ghosts, or in the word of a gypsy, and seise upon the most senseless means in need and sickness. It is possible to so lose God that one does not find Him even when face to face with death.—*Krummacher.*

— In a literal sense, the parallel to Ahaziah's folly can in vain be sought now in the changed aspects of the

church and the world. The heathen oracles are dumb. The prince of darkness, who seems in former ages to have wielded, by means of these incantations, a mysterious power, has now changed his ground. But yet how many in another form have their Ekrons still? There is the Ekron of *self-righteousness*—the pride of what they themselves have done, grounding their peace and confidences, alike for a living and dying hour, on some miserable fragmentary virtue of their own; their charities and alms-deeds and moral lives—the beggar proud of wearing some tinsel on his rags, the bankrupt proud of paying by farthings a debt which is accumulating by pounds and talents. There is the Ekron of *proud reason*. Men will not trust the simple word of the living God. The Bible doctrines, or, it may be, subordinate facts, do not square with their predilections and prepossessions, their preconceived notions and prejudices, and they send their imperious intellectual messengers to this haughty oracle. Happy are they who, spiritually enlightened, are not curious to know the process of cautery or cure, but who, gazing on the glorious uncurtained beauties of the moral world, before hidden from their view, can tell in the utterance of a simple faith: "This one thing I know, that whereas once I was blind, now I see."—*Macduff.*

Verse 3. The word of God is the sole, true, and correct oracle which we are to question and to take counsel of in every circumstance of life, and in all darkness and doubt. This generation, however, seeks light, wisdom, and truth amongst the Philistines, the wise and prudent of this world, who give out that the Word of the Lord is an old and unreliable book which no longer satisfies the existing grade of cultivation. They that will not enquire of the Word of God for their comfort shall be made to hear it, whether they will or no, to their amazement.—*Comprehensive Comm.*

Verses 4-8. If the messenger had brought to the king a declaration of the fly-god, he would have accepted it with faith; but he rejected the word of the prophet because it did not conform to his wishes; nay, it even filled him with anger and plans of murder. Men value the falsehood which flatters their inclinations and wishes, higher than the truth which corrects them and demands sacrifices and penitence of them.—*Lange.*

Verses 7-12.—With the fall of Ahab a series of new characters appears on the eventful scene. Elijah still remained for a time, but only to make way for successors. In the meeting of the four hundred prophets at Samaria he was not present. In the reign of Ahaziah and of Jehoram he appears but for a moment. There was a letter, the only written prophecy ascribed to him, and the only link which connected him with the history of Judah, addressed to the young prince who reigned with his father Jehoshaphat at Jerusalem. There was a sudden apparition of a strange being, on the heights of Carmel, to the messengers whom Ahaziah had sent to consult an oracle in Philistia. They were passing, probably, along the haunted strand, between the sea and the mountain; they heard the warning voice; they returned to their master. Their description could apply only to one man; it must be the wild prophet of the desert whom he had heard described by his father and grandfather. Troop after troop is sent to arrest the enemy of the royal house, to seize the lion in his den. On the top of Carmel they saw the solitary form. But he was not to be taken by human force; stroke after stroke of celestial fire was to destroy the armed bands. They retired, and he disappeared. It was to this act, some centuries afterwards, not far from the same spot, that the two ardent youths appealed and provoked that Divine rebuke which places the whole career of Elijah in its fitting place, as something in its own nature transitory, precursive, preparatory.—*Stanley.*

Verse 8. The faithful prophet

I. Has an unmistakable reputation. II. Is easily identified. III. Has great influence over the minds of others. IV. Is a guarantee of truthfulness in either threatening or promise.

Verses 9-14. **The judgment by fire.** I. A token of the indignation of heaven against idolatry. II. An answer to the stubborn daring of a godless king, and the insolence of his troopers. III. May be avoided by prayer and submission.

— We have here not the act of revenge of a prophet who was instigated by personal jealousy, but an act of divine judgment, and a revelation of God's wrath against all godlessness and wickedness of men "who hold the truth in unrighteousness." All judgments of God are represented in the Old Testament as a consuming fire (Numbers xi. 1; xvi. 35; Deuteronomy xxxii. 22; Psa. xxi. 9; Isa. xxvi. 11; Ezek. xv. 6 and 7; Job xx. 26). He Himself, even in His retributive justice, is called a consuming fire (Deut. iv. 24; ix. 3; Heb. xii. 29; x. 27). It is therefore perfectly in accordance with the concrete and literal character which the Old Testament economy bears throughout, that this actual fire should be the form of revelation of the divine wrath, so that in many places we can hardly distinguish whether it is intended to be taken literally or figuratively. Just as once the rebellious host of Korah was consumed by fire, and so Moses' authority as the servant of God was ratified (Num. xvi. 35); so the scoffing band of the idolatrous Ahaziah perished, and thereby the second Moses was corroborated as the man of God. As an act of divine judgment this catastrophe is rather a revelation of the highest moral intensity—a testimony to the unchangeable justice and holiness of God. Whoever finds it shocking, must be still more shocked at the prophetic declaration, "God is jealous, and the Lord avengeth; the Lord revengeth and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him" (Nahum i. 2-6).—*Lange.*

Verses 9-12. Wherein consisted the grievous crime of these captains and their men, who merely executed the command of their master? According to the simple words of the text in the address, man of God. Most interpreters say, the captains had used this designation in a contemptuous or ironical sense. But this is not satisfactory. Two cases are conceivable: either the captains held Elijah to be no true prophet, and then their address, as an insult to the prophetic office in the person of a man whom God had acknowledged by so many miracles as His servant, was a direct insult to the Lord; or they held Elijah to be a true prophet, and then the summons to surrender himself, in order to be led bound to the king, was a direct and still more daring contempt of the prophet as well as of the Lord his God. In either case, therefore, the punishment was just. The captains did not merely what they as servants of the king were bound to do, but shared in the ungodly disposition of their sovereign, and with reckless audacity insulted the Almighty God in the person of the prophet. This wicked opposition to God the Lord is punished, and certainly not by the prophet, but by the Lord Himself, who realizes the word of his servant. Whoever, therefore, on account of this act charges the prophet with cruelty, does not reflect that this charge falls not on the prophets, but much rather on God the Lord.—*Kiel.*

— The time was when two zealous disciples would fain have imitated this fiery revenge of Elijah, and were repelled with a check; the very place puts them in mind of the judgment; not far from Samaria was this done by Elijah, and wished to be done by the disciples. So churlish a rejection of a Saviour seemed no less heinous than the endeavour of apprehending a pro-

phet. "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, as Elias did?" The world yielded but one Elias; that which was zeal in him might be fury in another: the least variation of circumstance may make an example dangerous; presently, therefore, do they hear, "Ye know not of what spirit ye are." It is the calling that varies the spirit: Elijah was God's minister for the execution of so severe a judgment; they were but the servants of their own impotent anger; there was fire in their breasts which God never kindled. Far was it from the Saviour of men to second their earthly fire with this heavenly. He came, indeed, to send fire upon earth, but to warm, not to burn; and if to burn, not to persons of men, but their corruptions. How much more safe is it for us to follow the meek prophet of the New Testament, than that fervent prophet of the Old! Let the matter of our prayers be the sweet dews of mercy, not the fires of vengeance.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 9. Every servant of the Lord who is really earnest in his office must make up his mind that rude, low, and godless men will scorn him and name him "Man of God" in mockery. Although no fire from heaven falls down to destroy them, yet the Word of the Lord stands firm for all time: "He that despiseth you," &c. (Luke x. 16); and the Lord will not leave those unpunished who despise Him in His servants, and exercise their art upon the calling of reconciliation (Isa. xi. 10, 11).

— Great rulers always find people who will lend themselves as instruments of their perverted will, who execute with exactness and without scruple what "the king says"; but do not trouble themselves at all about what God says.—*Lange.*

— Behold the true son of Jezebel! The anguish of his disease, the expectation of death, cannot take off his persecution of Elijah; it is against his will that his deathbed is not bloody. Had Ahaziah meant any other than a cruel violence to Elijah, he had sent a peaceable messenger to call him to the court. He had not sent a captain, with a band of soldiers, to fetch him; the instruments which he useth carry revenge in their face. If he had not thought Elijah more than a man, what needed a band of fifty men to apprehend one? and if he did think him such, why would he send to apprehend him by fifty? Surely Ahaziah knew of old how miraculous a prophet was; what power that man had over all their base deities; what commands of the elements, of the heavens! And yet he sends to attack him. It is a strange thing to see how wilfully godless men strive against the stream of their own hearts, hating that which they know good, fighting against that which they know divine. What a gross disagreement is in the message of this Israelitish captain! "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down." If he were a man of God, how hath he offended? And if he hath justly offended the anointed of God, how is he a man of God? And if he be a man of God, and have not offended, why should he come down to punishment? Here is a kind confession, with a false heart, with bloody hands. The world is full of these windy courtesies, real cruelties. Deadly malice lurks under fair compliments, and, while it flatters, killeth. —*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 10. This was a miracle of Divine judgment, and in perfect keeping with the spirit of the old dispensation. In this respect the new dispensation widely differs from the old (Luke ix. 51-56). But it must not be understood that when our Lord rebuked the two disciples, and showed them the difference between the Law and the Gospel as to the spirit of each, He thereby blamed this act of Elijah's. He blamed the two disciples who dishonoured Elijah by endeavouring to pervert his act into a precedent for a proposal which was altogether dissimilar to that act of Elijah in all the circumstances of the case. Elijah was God's minister for

executing His Divine judgment. The two disciples were but the servants of their own anger.—*Wordsworth.*

Verse 12. Ahaziah could not fail by this time to be fully cognisant of these appalling judgments. He might possibly have ventured to put an Atheist construction on the death of the first fifty; that they had been victims of unhappy and untoward accident; that the lightnings, the capricious shafts from the quiver of nature, had by sad mishap fallen on the slopes of Carmel, where his soldiers were. But now that the very same catastrophe had overtaken the second relay, there could surely be little debate that a Higher Hand had put the bow on the string, and made ready the arrows. Blinded indeed must that dying monarch be, if he still refuse to desist from his mad, impotent rage. Alas! how much it takes to humble the proud heart! It is the saddest picture of moral apostasy—the saddest exponent of the enmity of the unregenerate heart—when even the king of terrors brings no terror to the seared conscience and indurated soul; the banner of proud defiance against God and His Christ waved, even when the awful gloom of mortal darkness is closing in all around!—*Macduff.*

Verses 13, 14. What marble or flint is harder than a wicked heart? As if Ahaziah would despitefully spit in the face of heaven, and wrestle a fall with the Almighty, he will needs yet again set a third captain upon so desperate an employment. How hot a service must this commander needs think himself put upon? Who can but pity his straits! There is death before him, death behind him. If he go not, the king's wrath is the messenger of death: if he go, the prophet's tongue is the executioner of death. Many a hard task will follow the service of a prince wedded to his passion, divorced from God. Unwillingly, doubtless, and fearfully, doth this captain climb up the hill to scale that impregnable fort; but now, when he comes near to the assault, the battery that he lays to it is his prayers; his surest fight is upon his knees. This was the way to offer violence to the prophet of God, to the God of that prophet, even humble supplications. We must deprecate that evil which we would avoid; if we would force blessings, we must entreat them. There is nothing to be gotten from God by strong hand; anything by suit.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 15-17. A memorable death-bed scene. I. A dying monarch faithfully warned. II. The fearless prophet alone in the midst of dangerous enemies—sees no peril in duty. III. A baffled and disappointed king, unsubdued by suffering, dying in silence, in impenitence, in darkness.

— The fifth of February, sixteen hundred and eighty-five, witnessed a sad scene in the palace of Whitehall. The second Charles lay in the last agony, while, amid the courtly circle around his bed, stood Sancroft, archbishop of Canterbury, and Ken, Bishop of Bath and Wells. "The king is really and truly a Catholic," whispered the Duchess of Portsmouth to the French Ambassador, "and yet his bed-chamber is full of Protestant clergymen." The fact had been long suspected, and gave additional earnestness to the holy men who desired to prepare the dying monarch for his inevitable and solemn change. "It is time to speak out, sir," exclaims Sancroft, "for you are about to appear before a Judge who is no respecter of persons." "Will you not die in the communion of the Church of England?" anxiously asks Ken. The king gave no response. On which the Bishop put forth all his eloquence, till his pathetic exhortation awed and melted the bystanders to such a degree, that some among them believed him to be filled with the same Spirit which in the old time had, by the mouths of Nathan and Elias, called sinful princes to repentance. To complete the parallel, we must notice another incident in the dying scene. "If it costs me my life," exclaims the Duke of

York, afterwards James II., "I will fetch a priest." With some difficulty he is found. He is smuggled into the royal presence and the chamber of death. "He is welcome," says Charles. The monarch who refused to listen to Sancroft and Ken, has an open ear for Father Huddleston. The monarch who was unwilling to die in the Church of England, is perfectly willing to die in the Church of Rome. Apologising to his attendants that he has been "an unconscionable time dying," he breathes his last, an apostate from the faith inseparable from England's throne, and for his abandonment of which his own successor died an exile on the charity of a foreign land. Let Ahaziah take the place of Charles II.; let his idolatry be represented in the popery of the British monarch; let the application to the god of Ekron be symbolized in the welcome given the Romish monk; and, last of all, let Elijah by the bedside of the king of Israel, dealing faithfully with the soul departing there, be the type of good Sancroft and Ken by that other couch, using all their entreaties to make the sufferer think of his approaching end—and the parallel is well-nigh complete.—*Howat.*

Verses 15, 16. A minister of God must not fear to hold up their sins before sinners and scoffers upon their death bed, and to draw their attention to the judgment of God, in order that, if possible, even in the last hour they may come to a knowledge of that which belongs to their peace, for to offer eternal blessedness to the rich and great, instead of calling them to repentance, is the worst trangression of a prophet; to conceal the approach of his end from one who is sick unto death, and to hold all thoughts of it from him, or even to console him with false hopes of recovery, is no genuine love; for no man can be properly prepared for death who does not think of it often and much.—*Lange.*

Verse 17. His death, like that of the two companies of fifties, was a judgment from heaven. It would not do to punish these messengers of the king for insolence towards Jehovah and his prophet, and let the king himself go clear. So this impious monarch is made to drag out his last days under a consciousness of being an object of Jehovah's wrath.—*Whedon.*

CHAPTER II.

THE TRANSLATION OF ELIJAH TO HEAVEN.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal—Not the Gilgal in Judah, but the Gilgal (now Jilgil) in Ephraim, near Ebal and Gerizim (Deut. xi. 30). Both Amos (iv. 4) and Hosea (iv. 15) mention it as, together with Bethel, being the chief seat of the calf-worship. Here was one of the schools of the prophets, and from these young men Elisha followed Elijah, as being divinely impelled to become the great prophet's successor. Verse 2. Tarry here, I pray thee—Elijah thought none beside himself knew of his near translation; but *Elisha* knew it (verse 3)—"*Yea, I know it;*" lit., I also know; and "the *sons of the prophets*," both at Bethel (verse 3) and Jericho (verse 5) knew it. The Lord hath sent me to Bethel—Obeying the Spirit's impulse, Elijah paid a farewell visit to each of these schools. Verse 3. Sons of the prophets—The בְּנֵי־הַנְּבִיאִים were the scholars, and not necessarily natural *sons*, of the prophets. Take thy master from thy head—Scholars sat at their master's feet (Acts xxii. 3); but the expression here has a more specific meaning than that custom suffices to explain, the phrase literally rendered being "*from* over *thy head*," and Keil, Bunsen, Thenius, and Böttcher accept it as intimating his removal by *ascension*, as ἀναλαμβάνειν in Acts i. 10. Hold ye your peace—This is not a surly retort, nor merely an

appeal that they would not spread the tidings, which might arouse public excitement and gather a concourse; but a request that they would preserve their minds calm, and neither afflict themselves nor him by sad thoughts of Elijah's near departure. Verse 7. Stood to view afar off—Watching in wonderment and anxiety their arrival at the river Jordan, over which there was no arrangement for these two to cross, and possibly anticipating for them some supernatural accommodation or sign. What occurred would necessarily remind them of Moses act (Exod. xiv. 16). The "rod" of Moses by which *he* smote the waters was the symbol of his commission as leader of the pilgrim hosts; the "mantle" of Elijah was the symbol of his prophetic office. And the parting of the waters was in each instance a Divine authentication of his office. Verse 9. A double portion of thy spirit—The "two parts"—פִּי שְׁנַיִם—was the legal share in his father's possessions appointed to the firstborn (Deut. xxi. 17). Elisha requests—פִּי שְׁנַיִם בְּרוּחֲךָ—"a double portion *in thy spirit*." Some expositors have sought to show that Elisha asked and received larger prophetic endowments than Elijah possessed; but this is a false interpretation of the words. *Keil* wisely says:—"He that is departing cannot bequeath to his heir more than he himself has." Elisha only asks that he may inherit Elijah's office, not merely as one of the prophets, but as a worthy successor to Elijah in foremost and powerful service for Jehovah. Verse 10. Asked a hard thing—An extraordinary blessing and honour which is not mine to give, but God's (*comp.* Christ's answer to the sons of Zebedee, Matt. xx. 23); yet if Elisha was divinely allowed to *see* Elijah's departure—a favour denied to all other "sons of the prophets"—it would doubtless indicate his election to succeed his master to eminent prophetic dignity. Verse 11. Chariots of fire and horses of fire—Oriental imagery (*comp.* Psa. lxviii. 17; Isa. lxvi. 15; Hab. iii. 8) suggestive of an *angelic train*: "His ministers a flame of fire" (Psa. civ. 4); *comp.* also 2 Kings vi. 14-17. Observe that the words "*there appeared*" are not in the text. Possibly a supernatural storm-cloud, illumined with lightning, rushed between them. Elijah went up by a whirlwind—Not in literal "chariots," &c., at all, but simply in a whirlwind, בַּסְּעָרָה, which confirms the idea of a storm-cloud. Verse 12. My father, my father—Thus doubly asserting his sonship, and claiming his double portion. Own clothes and rent them—Expressive of extreme grief over his loss; perhaps, also, a sign of abandoning his own past humble lot, and taking up the mantle of a new and higher career. Verse 14. Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when, &c.—In the Hebrew text, following the word Elijah, come the words אַף הוּא, which have been by some expositors changed into various forms, but unsatisfactorily; their natural meaning is, "*even he*," and should be added to the question, Where is Jehovah, God of Elijah, even He?—Verse 16. Lest peradventure, &c.—They had seen Elijah pass miraculously over Jordan, but did not witness his ascension. Even if he had been taken up to heaven, they imagined that his body would be remaining somewhere on earth. Verse 20. A new cruse—"A symbol of the renewing power of the Word of God" (*Keil*). Verse 21. Death or barren *land*; death or *abortion*. Verse 23. Little children—see note on נַעַר in 1 Kings iii. 7; same word as in 1 Kings xii. 8, 10, 14, *young men*. נְעָרִים describes ages from children to young men inclusive. Possibly these youthful revilers in sceptical Bethel, scoffing at Elisha's report of Elijah's translation to heaven, derisively taunted him, bidding him likewise "go up." Baldhead—an Eastern epithet of contempt used regardless of the person being bald or old. Baldness was a mark of shame (Isa. iii. 17, 24); priests were forbidden to shave (Levit. xxi. 5). Their destruction was appalling, but rendered necessary by the profanity of the town. Had no judgment followed this insolent contemning of Jehovah in the person of His newly-designated prophet, it would have confirmed the people in their defiance and impiety.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-15.

The three great dispensations of religion has each its illustration of a glorious ascension into heaven. The translation of Enoch occurred in the patriarchal age. The scene on Olivet represents the ascension or translation of the Christian era. And the remarkable translation of Elijah recorded in this paragraph very appropriately belongs to the prophetic age. Regarding this event we remark—

I. It was at a time that harmonized with the Divine purpose. "And it came to pass when the Lord would take up Elijah" (verse 1). The work of the great prophet was done—a work never agreeable to ordinary men—a work of stern reproof, of faithful warning, of fiery vengeance. The time of his departure was also revealed to Elijah. But mark the modesty of true greatness. He does not assemble Israel; he does not summon Jehoram and his court, nor his great opponent Jezebel, before whom he had once fled, to witness his triumphant ascent to glory. He would fain be alone; his love of solitude remains to the last, and he would like to leave the world as suddenly and unobtrusively as it had been originally entered. But he could not shake off the devotion of Elisha; nor could he hide his approaching departure from the sons of the prophets whom he had been for years preparing for their work. God chose the time; and it was not until due arrangements had been made to carry on and perfect the work which Elijah had for a time carried on almost alone. God knows the best time to send and take away His instruments. Men depart; but the work of God proceeds.

II. It was in a manner that harmonized with the spirit and character of his great life-work (verse 11). The prophet whose life has been like a flame, bursting out now and then into an irresistible conflagration, very appropriately terminates his career in a blaze of heavenly light. "Suddenly over the valley, as in Ezekiel's vision, there breaks an unwonted sight. There seems a burning equipage, speeding down from heaven, swift as the lightning, and more vivid than any flash. There seems a chariot of fire, with wheels of flame, and horses of fire snorting flame from mouth and nostril. There seem reins of fire and riders of fire, and wings of fire from fiery hosts on every hand. The aged prophet bows his head, conscious that his hour has come; and there, as the tempest weaves itself around him, we see him placed in the centre of the car of flame, and in the sight of the astounded Elisha and the fifty students on the heights of Jericho, Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." If our life has been in harmony with the will of God, we may safely leave the character of its close to Him.

III. It was a type of the triumph of the good over the power of death. Death is robbed of its sting and shorn of its terror to the lovers of Elijah's God; it is but a change from a good to a better state of existence; it is not to be feared, but to be welcomed; it is the gateway into a more glorious life. The change which must have taken place in the body of Elijah was only more rapid and less evident than what must take place in ours. Death is the hour not of defeat, but of triumph.

> Death is the crown of life,
> Death wounds to cure; we fall, we rise, we reign;
> Spring from our fetters; fasten in the skies,
> Where blooming Eden withers in our sight.
> Death gives us more than was in Eden lost.
>
> *Young.*

IV. It intensified the power of the prophet's influence. A man like Elijah could never be forgotten; but the miraculous and mysterious character of his exit tends to keep alive more vividly his reputation and memory. He was grievously missed, and his absence sincerely mourned (verse 12); but he lived on in the spirit and power of Elisha; and he lives to-day in the spirit of every bold and faithful champion of the truth. "Where is the court of Samaria now? Passed away and perished like the smoke of its own idolatry. It is Elijah alone who lives in deathless and fadeless renown. We pass by Herod, and remember John the Baptist. We pass by Felix, and remember the apostle Paul. We

pass by Charles V., and remember Martin Luther. We pass by Ahab and Jezebel, and remember only ELIJAH."

LESSONS:—1. *Extraordinary times call forth extraordinary men.* 2. *The greatest men are made so by special Divine endowments.* 3. *The good influence of a great spirit is immortal.*

THE PARTING OF ELIJAH AND ELISHA.

ALL partings bring with them a measure of sadness. Life is short, and so the same parting can, at most, be only repeated a certain number of times; life is uncertain, and so each parting carries with it the possibility that it may be the last one. And if this is so with regard to the everyday partings of life—to the good-bye said to the child as he leaves the hall for school, or the cottage for service, to the farewell kiss to a daughter on her wedding morning, or to a dear son about to go abroad for some indefinite period, how is it with us when the parting is known on both sides to be (for this world) a final one? How is it with us when a father about to commend his spirit to the hands that gave it, calls his children about him to receive his latest blessing? When some loving and beloved wife commits the little dear ones that she is forced to leave behind her to the care of her agonized husband? When some bishop like Ambrose, some pastor like Bede, is solemnly resigning to the Great Shepherd the flock over which he has long and faithfully watched? Let those answer who have passed through one such scene. These are the partings which none can witness and remain unmoved; which no man can partake in, and continue altogether the same man that he was before.

I. Now it is such a parting that this chapter sets before us. The elder of those two men who are going down together to Jordan has been all in all to the younger for many years. From the time when Elijah silently cast his mantle on Elisha, from the day when Elisha "kissed his father and his mother," and left his home to follow the stern prophet of the deserts—he has watched, he has listened, he has reverenced, and now he is watching, he is listening to him for the last time. And not on Elisha only, though on him most heavily, falls the awe of the coming parting. There are many young men, sons of the prophets, in training for the ministry of the Word, to whom it has been revealed that Elijah has now paid them his latest visit—has taught, warned, and advised them for the last time. Knowest thou not that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day? were words addressed to Elisha at each school of the prophets—whether that of Gilgal, of Bethel, or of Jericho, to which he had accompanied Elijah on this his last visitation. And, from the last-named and nearest of these three places, fifty young men had followed the prophet and his friend, till, left behind at their miraculous passage of the Jordan, they stood on its farther bank only able to send wistful glances after them, in spite of their earnest longing to catch at least a glimpse of the glory of Elijah's departure. These, in their measure, doubtless felt the pain of parting, and kept treasuring in their hearts the words addressed to them by their great teacher. But, if such the sorrow, such the love of Elijah's scholars, what must have been the love, and what the sorrow, of his chosen companion and most intimate friend? We see something of them in Elisha's firm resolve to stay with his master till all was over. We hear something of them in his reply, which he cannot vary, let it sound, if it will, like a refusal of his loved teacher's last request. Thrice Elijah says to him, "Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me unto Bethel, or to Jericho, or to Jordan;" thrice Elisha answers, with a firmness that admits of no rejoinder,

"As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." The apparent disobedience is forgiven, nay, approved of; for it springs from the fountain of deep, long-tried holy affection. It turns Elijah's mind from the thought of the glorious future, from the backward glance on the eventful past, to think how it is to fare with his dear Elisha in this wicked world in which he must leave him for awhile.

II. We can picture the prophet to ourselves walking on absorbed in solemn memories and in joyful expectation. Fearful dangers, wonderful deliverances, fight after fight with crowned and sceptred wickedness. Ahab rebuked, Jezebel denounced, Kishon reddened with the blood of Baal's prophets, perils in the city, hidings in the wilderness—all these things lie behind him now. He is going to meet that God that sent the ravens to feed him by the lonely brook, and His angel to refresh him under the juniper tree of the desert; the God who granted his fervent prayer on Carmel, whose still small voice spoke to him at the entrance of the cave Horeb. And yet neither crowding recollections, nor eager thoughts of the coming glory and gladness, make him unmindful of his friend at his side. He turns to him with the words, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee," and receives in answer the wise petition for a first-born's portion of his spirit. The prophet's last occupation on earth is to prefer this request, and to obtain an answer to it favourable—yet suspended on a condition which he thus reports to Elisha: "Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." Now to see this great sight must, in any case, have been the young man's strongest wish. With so much depending upon it, how earnestly must he have prayed for strength to behold it! His prayer was granted; when the chariot of fire and horses of fire came down, and the angels of God carried Elijah with a whirlwind's speed up towards heaven, Elisha was enabled to gaze steadfastly at the awful light that wrapped his master's form: hidden in which it retreated from his view. Then, like a last message, Elijah's mantle comes floating down to his feet. Elisha lifts it up, and knows by this token that he has been appointed the successor to the great prophet. He has just rent his own clothes with the plaintive cry of a bereaved heart, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof;" but now something tells him that the God who commissioned and upheld Elijah is giving a like charge to him, and will assuredly, therefore, not fail to give him a like support. He hushes the voice of lamentation, and with the mantle in his hand he goes back to Jordan. An hour before, Elijah had with that same mantle smitten the waters of the river, and they had parted, "so that they two went over on dry ground." Now it is Elisha who stands alone by the river's brink, crying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" as he smites the waters as his master has done. And he finds Him close at hand. The waters part for Elisha, as they parted for Elijah. The young prophets, owning that the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha, hasten to do him homage. And from that day begins Elisha's long and noble career of wise and loving teaching, confirmed by sign and by wonder.

III. How often, since then, have two gone down to Jordan, and one returned alone, but filled with the spirit and power of the other! An Augustine receives a Monica's last words, and the holy mother seems to live on in her holy son. A Timothy stands by a St. Paul in his condemned cell at Rome, and returns to Ephesus to earn from his Lord the praise—"For my name's sake thou hast laboured, and hast not fainted!" A Polycarp listens to the aged St. John's short sermon on love, and goes forth to "be faithful unto death." How often to a mind overwhelmed—not more by a sense of personal bereavement than by that of an irreparable loss to the Church at large—has come the intimation:

"You are to fill this vacant place: it may be with weaker powers, yet to the best of your ability you are to stand where that standard-bearer stood before!" And with the call there comes the strength to obey it. Elijah's mantle, though grasped by a feeble hand, can smite the waters asunder still, if its holder only call faithfully on his master's God.

IV. But no Christian can stop short at this reflection, without going on to another: can look at one of the plainest foreshadowings of Christ in the Old Testament, and not have the apostles' feelings, as they witnessed their Lord's ascension, vividly brought before him. For, as it was with Elisha beside the Jordan, so (only in more abundant measure) must it have been with them on Olivet. Each of them had been called to follow Him, as Elisha had been by Elijah: one of them, as Elisha did, had shown his joy at the summons by a feast. To each of them, doubtless, it would have been a grief of griefs not to have been allowed to follow Christ in His last walk on earth, past the Gethsemane of His agony to the mount of His ascension. But we do not find that their great Master tried their affections, as Elisha's did his, by a request to remain behind. On His way to resume that glory which was His from eternity, our Lord's mind could not be filled with the awe caused by the comin new and strange thing, which made even the undaunted Elijah shrink from all human observation. Nor could the Son of God doubt, as Elijah did, His own power to bestow the firstborn's portion—the fulness of His Holy Spirit—on each of His beloved apostles. His word to them was not "Ye have asked a hard thing," but "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you." So when, not by "chariots of fire and horses of fire," but by the might of His own Divine nature, Christ, with His hands yet raised to bless, goes up, and is lost to the apostles' sight amid the clouds of heaven, there is no rending of their garments; no crying, as with an exceeding bitter cry, for a vanished defence, for a suddenly-withdrawn support: they have heard and believed these great words, "I will not leave you comfortless; lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!" And so they worship their ascended Lord, and return with great joy to obey His commands at Jerusalem.

V. And surely this grand story supplies an antidote to the bitterness of every parting. The man who loves Christ, his friend in Christ, his enemy for Christ's sake, is alone safe and happy. For he alone loses not one dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him, who cannot be lost. And who is this, but Thou, O our God! Tnee none loses, but he who leaves Thee. Whoever, then, may be taken from our sight, Christ still remains with us. Only let us keep close to His footsteps, cling to His Cross; see Him strike the waves with His sacred body, as He, by dying, overcomes death; behold those dark waters parted by His resurrection; see, by faith, His ascended glory, and daily seek and obtain by prayer our own double portion of His Spirit. So, grasping our Master's mantle, His word and His sacraments, shall we find the waters of sin and sorrow divide before them, or rather before His might who will come with them; till at the last we stand beside the black river of death, yet fear no evil, for Christ is with us still: and that torrent, too, parts asunder, and lets us safe through to the other side.—*Day of Rest* for 1879.

The Noblest Legacy of the Departed Good (verse 9).

The time had come for Elijah to leave the world in which he had been God's faithful witness. The prophet's stormy life is to receive appropriate termination in the whirlwind, whose close shall be in the calm of heaven. He is to be distinguished by such honour as have no others of God's saints. When human

greatness sinks and ceases, his shall be most manifest. And while Ahab, at the end of his days, falls from his chariot into the dust, and dies in dishonour, Elijah is caught up behind the flaming coursers, and in more than royal grandeur passes up to heaven. His own personal work upon the earth is over. All that God gave him to do, when he came to the prophet in his despair, and spake to him in the still, small voice, has been accomplished. There is no regret at departure, no desire to remain, no task undone that yet claims his presence. But in the absence of any personal need, he turns to his companion, the successor to his prophetic office. And ere yet the sound of the whirlwind is heard, or the sky is lit by the chariot of fire, he kindly requires of Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee."

The inquiry suggest to us what we are often slow to recognise: *The greatest need, the most solemn position, is not with those who are leaving the world, but with those who remain.* Not Elijah, but Elisha, requires strength and help. It was a perception of Elisha's greater need that prompted the invitation. For himself rest is at hand; the perils of his life are past; his enemies can no longer harm him. But the younger man, who is about to take the prophet's place in Israel, with all its responsibilities and trials—his was the need. And this is often true where no chariot of fire waits to convey the departing, but where they die as other men. It is hard to die, say some. It may be; but it is a great deal harder to live. And when in peace and hope the good man is sinking down into rest, while our sympathy and affection go out to him, yet our most serious and solemn thought should be for ourselves; for those into whose lives, because of his departure, desolation and sorrow must come, and who have still to face the responsibilities, and duties, and temptations of life. Not the Elijah, for whom heaven's chariot is waiting, but the Elisha, who has still to walk the world, and before whom lie years of toil and trial, must be chiefly considered. It suggests also that—*Our power to bless others is limited by our lives.* "Before I be taken away from thee." Elijah cannot pledge himself to anything after his departure. While he yet lingers upon the earth he may help and bless his successor. We can only bless the world while we are present in it. It is true that many have conferred good and blessing upon others long after themselves had passed from the sight of men. But it is equally true that the good has come out of what they were, and what they did, while yet present with men. We have entered into a rich heritage of blessing from the departed good; we receive manifold benefits from them to-day; but it is not, so far as we know, from any direct relation in which they stand to us now—not from any unseen yet mighty influence they consciously and directly exert over us now—not from any efforts on our behalf made by them now, but simply from their characters and lives, their thoughts and words, before they were taken away from us. Looking mainly at the younger prophet's request, it seems to present to us—*The noblest legacy of the departed good;* and, *the measure in which we should seek to possess it.* "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." This was the wisest request Elisha could have presented. There were other things which he might have desired, and which it would seem natural in him to have requested. He might, for instance, have entreated Elijah to delay his departure, and to remain a little longer on the earth as his leader and friend. Or, failing this, he might have supplicated in passionate devotion that he, too, should accompany his father prophet through the skies. Or, dazzled by the glory of his master's departure, he might have asked that for himself also a chariot of fire might be dispatched when his work on earth was done. But, passing by all the common instincts and feelings of men, he earnestly beseeches: "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

What are we to understand by "thy spirit?" Did Elisha refer to any supernatural endowment by which the prophet was of old distinguished, and

by which he was fitted for the duties of the prophetic office? He surely could not refer to the Holy Spirit in the sense in which we understand the blessing. We think he must mean that which was the dominating principle of Elijah's character—the master passion of his soul—his fidelity to God, and zeal for his Name.

I. This spirit of the great and good is their noble legacy—our richest inheritance. 1. *The spirit of Elijah was the secret of Elisha's power.* It was this which had made him so mighty in Israel, which had enabled him to achieve the transformation on Carmel, and rendered him stronger in his single self than the hundreds of Baal's priests and prophets. There was much that was strange and marvellous about him; much in his garb and mien and speech that impressed and overawed men. But his real grandeur was internal, not external; and his power lay not in natural gifts or even supernatural endowment, but in his sublime faithfulness to God—his burning jealousy for God's honour and name. So has it been with the great and good of past ages, and with those who have been near and next to ourselves. We are prone to place a man's power in natural gifts and external advantages. But all experience proves that, in the work of the Lord, a simple, earnest, soul-possessing faithfulness is superior to all beside. He who has it, whatever else he may have or have not, is a true Elijah, who shall bring down the sacred fire, not upon a slaughtered bullock, but upon the souls of men. 2. *The spirit of the great and good alone can compensate for their departure and loss.* Elisha felt that Elijah must go. But as he looked upon the faithful prophet of God, he says, in effect, "If I cannot have thy presence, let me have thy spirit. I can bear the loss of the one, if I gain the other." So it is with the Church to-day. God is constantly removing his servants, lifting them from our sight into that sphere whither Elijah was taken in his chariot of fire. What is to compensate us for their departure? Not their generous gifts, but their earnest spirit. We can do without them, and still carry on successfully the work of the Lord, only as we catch and manifest their spirit. Their loss to the Church is only made up as their spirit is transmitted, received, and manifested in those who remain. 3. *The spirit of the great and good is alone unchanging in its character, and meets the requirements of every age.* Elisha's work in Israel was very different to Elijah's. A new generation was springing up, and many changes had taken place. The prophet's person and office were very differently regarded. The method and form of Elijah's ministry would have been out of place, and a slavish adherence to it would have been hurtful. But the same spirit was as needful as ever, and was still adapted to the altered conditions. This is true of all the ages of the world and of all the ages of Christianity. Vast and sweeping changes transpire: the face of society, the attitude and disposition of the world to the Church, are greatly altered in the course of years. We do not stand where our fathers stood. We are not required to think, to speak, to act, in all matters as they thought, and spake, and acted. But their spirit, their stern uncompromising hatred to evil, their unflinching fidelity to God, is required by us, and alone can fit us to serve our generation as they served theirs. 4. *To catch and inherit the spirit of the good and great is to attain the deepest and truest resemblance to them.* There were many respects in which the younger prophet could never be like his predecessor. They were two different men, presenting in many points a bold, clear contrast in each other. Some might have said to Elisha: "Go forth among the people in the rough garment they know so well, imitate Elijah's gestures and movements, speak in his tone and manner, pursue his mode of life and labour, and men will say: 'Lo, a second Elijah has appeared amongst us.'" But Elisha judged more wisely. He sought no outward resemblance such as would make him a feeble counterpart of the other—such as would do violence to his own nature, weaken his own powers,

and lessen his usefulness. His cry was: "Let me have Elijah's spirit, to work through my own powers and according to the modes God shall appoint and teach." We do not honour, nor do we really resemble, the great and good by any servile imitation of them. We must study their lives, and characters, and works, not that we may conform ourselves in all things to them, but that their spirit may animate us, and work with equal, or even greater power, through our varied gifts. If this be not our object, we shall utterly fail. The man who studies the works of the great painters simply that he may reproduce their style, imitate their lines and colouring, will never attain a high position in the world of art. He only will succeed who studies those works in order to catch therefrom the inspiration, the enthusiasm, that glowed in the breasts of those who transferred to the canvas the visions of beauty that were given to them.

II. The measure in which we should seek to possess it. "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." The request may, in this aspect of it, appear somewhat strange. It would seem as though Elisha coveted something higher and better than was to be found in Elijah himself. Yet it may have been the utterance of a genuine humility. It may mean: "My nature is so weak and poor compared with my master's, that I need a larger measure of his spirit, in order to overcome my weakness and deficiency." But, in any sense, the form of the petition is justifiable, and should serve as an example to us. 1. *Each succeeding age brings with it largely increased responsibilities.* We have greater means of knowledge, larger opportunities of usefulness, than men had before us. Our temptations, if not so gross and palpable, are yet more refined, and subtle, and ensnaring. The difficulties in the way of leading a thoroughly earnest Christian life, and of fulfilling its duties, are greater now than they ever were. The tremendous responsibilities of the age in which we live should prompt a prayer of this kind. 2. *Christian character and usefulness should partake of the great law of progress everywhere observable.* There is not a department of human thought and human life but is affected by it. And we should seek that our piety should be of a higher type, more complete, and free from the defects that have been manifested in others. It is in harmony with all that we see elsewhere that we should present for ourselves this prayer. 3. *Such a petition in relation to the great and good is the echo of their own thoughts and wishes concerning us.* The greater and better men have been, the more conscious have they been of their own infirmities and imperfections, and the more anxious that others should be free from them. It has been their earnest and continued prayer that those who should come after them should be greater and more useful than themselves. 4. *This petition is based upon the great principle that absolute perfection is not to be found in any simply human example.* We are not to set up human standards for ourselves, or limit ourselves by the attainments of others. We must learn to rise above the highest, to look through and beyond the noblest, of God's servants. Our limit is not fixed for us in any like ourselves. We are called "to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."—*W. Perkins.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-15. Heavenward. It is clear that a great day is come. The young men in the schools of the prophets at Gilgal, at Bethel, and at Jericho, are in unusual agitation. Elijah visits them all in succession. His manner is that day even more than commonly solemn, and his countenance and converse more heavenward; and all his demeanour seems to say, "Ye shall see my face no more." They fear to question their great

master; but they venture to whisper to Elisha the inquiry, if he knows that his master and theirs was that day to be taken away? They seemed to want his confirmation of a fact of which they had received a Divine intimation, but feared to misapprehend. His answer was—"Yea, I know it. Hold ye your peace." Being aware of this, Elisha resolves not to quit his master that day, notwithstanding Elijah plainly declares a wish to proceed alone. They came to the Jordan, for even an Elijah must cross the Jordan before he passes from the world, though it be not by the gates of death. But, lo, a wonder!—the prophet takes his mantle, and smites therewith the stream, which then divides to let the friends pass. Here, again, was faith; but Elijah knew that seas, rivers, and mountains are no obstruction to him who, with steadfast feet, walks in the path of duty. It was because he was in that path, and because he knew that what he asked was in accordance with God's will, that his faith was met by miracles, which, apart from these conditions, it had been presumption in him to demand. Faith must have the word or promise of God on which to rest. It is in this we discern the difference between the sublime and effectual faith of the devout Elijah, and the insane pretensions of such men as William Hackett (afterwards hanged), who, in the reign of Elizabeth, had the hardihood to declare, that if all England prayed for rain, and he himself prayed against, there would be dry weather. "Thou, Lord," he said, "hast the power, and I have the faith—therefore it shall be done!"

It was when they had passed the Jordan that the departing prophet asked his faithful disciple what last favour he desired of him. This was a trying question, which few would be able promptly to answer with entire satisfaction to their after-thoughts. But Elisha knew that of spiritual blessings too much could not be asked. He therefore said, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." His master confessed that this was a hard thing; but that it would be granted if he took care to be present at the moment of separation. But what was that double portion of Elijah's spirit which his disciple desired? One would think that it expressed the possession of such qualities as should make him twice as great a prophet as his master. But it was not so; for although Elisha became a great prophet, and wrought miracles as great as those of Elijah, and in greater number, no one feels that he was greater as a prophet or as a man than his master, or so great. His meaning is explained by the fact that the heir was entitled to a double portion of his father's goods; hence, in asking for the double portion of his master's spirit, Elisha meant to claim the heirship or succession to Elijah in his place as prophet in Israel. He had reason to suppose that it was meant for him; but he wished to be assured of this by some token which should be satisfactory to himself and others. As they went on, conversing of high things, suddenly a whirlwind reft Elijah from his companion, and he was borne aloft like an exhalation, in a chariot with horses of fire, or glowing like fire, to heaven, followed by the cry of the forsaken disciple, as he rent his clothes—"My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" Meaning, as is generally understood, that he regarded Israel as bereft of its strength, its chariot, and its horsemen, by the departure of this great prophet. He failed not, however, to take up the precious mantle which fell from Elijah as he rose; and he felt, in the beating of his own heart, the assurance that his prayer had been granted. And he knew it still more when he reached and smote the waters with the mantle. At first, it seems, there was no response; but when he repeated the stroke with the words—"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" the waters separated, and he passed over. The sons of the prophets noted this on their distant watch, and recognized by this sign their new master, on whom rested the spirit of Elijah. This is a strange transaction, and we

cannot hope as yet to understand it fully. It seems to us, however, that it is but an isolated anticipation of that which shall happen collectively to the righteous that are alive on the earth at our Lord's second coming. (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17). And, "in that sudden strange transition," the body will undergo a change, divesting it of its earthly essence, and bringing it into conformity with the glorified bodies of the saints raised from the dead.

Then what hinders that this rapture of the living, and change in the act of rapture—change, because the flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, which is to take place on so large a scale on that great day—should be exemplified in one or two instances before—in this instance of Elijah, and in the earlier instance of Enoch?

Under this view, there is no more any objection to the departed Elijah having his place in heaven, seeing that his body must have undergone all that change which was needful to fit it for abiding in that place where nothing corruptible can exist. Not discerning this, the old schoolmen were of opinion that Elijah was taken to some place—doubtless a pleasant place—prepared of old, as they supposed, for those pious spirits which awaited the coming of the Messiah who should open paradise for them. Others have staggered at the text (John iii. 16), understanding it to allege that none ascended to heaven before Christ. Hence they imagine that Elijah was taken to "Abraham's bosom," which they conceive to be an intermediate state in the air, granting, however, that his garments were burned in the fire, and his body changed and made immortal. But is that really a staggering text? We think not. It is not usually supposed to refer to the Ascension at all; but allowing it to have that reference, it could only mean that none of the dead should ascend to heaven before Christ, seeing that He was the first-fruits of them that slept—that is, that died. But Elijah did not die.

Elijah is supposed by the Jews to be frequently employed in missions to mankind, and as in some sense ubiquitous, being present in many places at one time. He is visible only to those deeply versed in the Cabbala, and is described as a venerable old man with a long beard. He is supposed to be alway present at circumcisions, and there is a chair kept vacant for him. Those who are the special objects of his notice are highly favoured.—*Kitto.*

Verses 1-15. As in patriarchal times Enoch walked with God, and was translated to heaven without tasting death (Gen. v. 24; Heb. xi. 5), so under the Mosaic dispensation we have this record of Elijah, whose whole life was a monumental wonder of Divine intercourse and power, and whose removal from the world without tasting death surpassed in sublimity and grandeur the translation of the patriarchal saint. To study and appreciate the closing scenes in the history of this great man is to tread on holy ground. The ascension of Elijah has ever been regarded as typical of the ascension of our Lord; and there are points of resemblance, as well as noticeable contrasts. Elijah, says Kiel, ascended in the fiery tempest, the symbol of the judicial righteousness of God. And appropriately; because, as a servant of the Lord, as minister of the law, he preached with fiery zeal to his apostate generation the fire of the anger of Divine righteousness. Christ ascended calmly and silently before the eyes of all His disciples, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. He ascended as the Son, to whom all power in heaven and earth was given. He was transfigured by His resurrection and ascension into the imperishable Divine nature, and returned, by virtue of His Eternal Godhead, to the Father. Since Elijah's ascension took place near where Moses died and was buried (Deut. xxxiv. 5), and since both these holy prophets met with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, it is natural for us to compare them in the manner

of their leaving the world. Moses died on account of his sin at Kadesh (Deut. xxxii. 50, 51), and, though he was lawgiver, he passed from his earthly life by the way of the law, which worketh death as the wages of sin. But Elijah, as typical forerunner of Christ, and who, appearing again in spirit and power in the person of John the Baptist, prepares His way by turning the hearts of the fathers to the children (Mal. iv. 5, 6; Matt. xi. 14), ascends to heaven without tasting death, and thus further points to Him who, by His resurrection and ascension, destroys the power of sin and of death, and abolishes the curse of the law from every one that believeth.—*Whedon.*

Verses 1-10. **The approaching dissolution of the good.** I. While viewed with solemnity, creates no alarm. II. Does not interfere with the active duties of the hour. III. Gives a special significance to everything done for the Church of God. IV. Makes one anxious to catch and retain for the world's good the ennobling influence of their divinely-endowed lives.

Verses 1-6. **True friendship.** I. *Often exists between persons of opposite characteristics.* The rough, intrepid, fierce Elijah stood in marked contrast with the calm, gentle, persuasive Elisha. II. *Is founded on mutual admiration and affection.* Contrasts of character react on loving friends. Elijah's ruggedness would be somewhat smoothed by the tranquillising spirit of Elisha; and the timid Elisha would feel more courageous under the influence of the fearless Elijah. III. *Is the more tenacious in the near prospect of separation.* "I will not leave thee" (verses 2, 4, 6). It was known to Elisha and to the sons of the prophets that Elijah would be speedily taken from their midst (verses 3, 5). Notwithstanding Elijah's craving to be alone—a craving that may often be noticed in the dying as the final hour draws near—Elisha persisted in his attendance, eager to prolong to the latest hour the hallowing fellowship, and perhaps expecting further revelations as to his own future conduct.

Verses 2-6. The faithful love of Elisha to his master and lord. 1. *The ground and source of it.* It does not rest upon a natural, human basis, but upon a divine and holy one. The bond which bound him to Elijah was living faith in the living God, and life and labour in and with Him. He honoured and loved his father after the flesh (1 Kings xxx. 20), but he left him; with his spiritual father he wished to remain unto the end. 2. *Its test and successful endurance.* Thrice did Elijah beg him to remain behind, but he would not be persuaded. Whithersoever the path may lead, and whatsoever may come to pass, I will not leave thee until God shall take thee from me. His love was not a mere passing, bubbling enthusiasm, but it was strong as death. That love alone is true which endures trial, and will not be turned aside by any prayers, for which no hindrance is too great, no journey too long and too hard. 3. *Its victory and reward.* Elijah opens for him the path through the Jordan after his fidelity has stood the test. He is allowed to see what no human being besides him might see. He attains to that which he has prayed for; with Elijah's mantle he inherits also Elijah's spirit; he is a witness of his master's glory. That fidelity conquers and is crowned which holds fast to God and Jesus Christ.—*Lange.*

Verse 3. No over-hasty gossip or sensation ought to be made about acts of God, especially about those which are still future; they may not be treated as objects of curious or worldly questionings. The acts of God are meant to be awaited in respectful silence. Those who are capable of seeing the majesty of the living God kept silent of themselves; upon others they have to enjoin silence.—*Vilmar.*

Verses 6-8. They descended the long, weary slopes that led from Jericho to the Jordan. On the upper terraces, or on the mountain heights behind the city, stood afar off, in awe, fifty of the young disciples; and they

two stood by Jordan. They stood by its rushing stream; but they are not to be detained even by this barrier. "The aged Gileadite cannot rest till he again sets foot on his own side of the river." He ungirds the rough mantle from around his shaggy frame; he rolled it together as if into a wonder-working staff; he smote the turbid river as if it were a living enemy, and the waters divided hither and thither, and they two went over on dry ground. And now they were on that farther shore, under the shade of those hills of Pisgah and of Gilead, where, in former times, a prophet greater even than Elijah had been withdrawn from the eyes of his people, whence, in his early youth, Elijah had himself descended on his august career. He knew that his hour was come, he knew that he had at last returned home, and that he had to go whither Moses had gone before him.—*Stanley.*

Verse 7. Miracles are not purposed to silence and obscurity. God will not work wonders without witnesses, since He doth them on purpose to win glory to His name. His end were frustrate without their notice. Even so, O Saviour! when thou hadst raised thyself from the dead, thou wouldst be seen of more than five hundred brethren at once; and when thou wouldst raise up thy glorified body from earth into heaven, thou didst not ascend from some close valley, but from the Mount of Olives; not in the night, not alone, but in the clear day, in the view of many eyes, which were so fixed upon that point of thine heaven that they could scarce be removed by the check of angels!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 8. On the other side of Jordan is the place of the glorification of the prophet. Between him and this spot there flows yet a broad and deep stream. Through this he must go. There is no bridge, no ferryman; but he does not despair. He knows, He who has called me to the other side will help me to the other side. Such incidents occur to many on the pilgrimage of life. No stream is so deep, and no flood of calamity so dangerous, that God could not lead through it unharmed. The prophet-mantle, which to-day, as ever, when it falls upon any Jordan, divide, its waves, is faith—strong, glad, living, rock-firm faith.—*Wirth.*

— Jordan must be crossed by Elijah on his way to heaven. There must be a meet parallel betwixt the two great prophets that shall meet Christ upon Tabor—Moses and Elias. Both received visions on Horeb; to both God appeared there in fire and other forms of terror; both were sent to kings one to Pharaoh, the other to Ahab; both prepared miraculous tables—the one of quails and manna in the desert, the other of meal and oil in Sarepta; both opened heaven—the one for that nourishing dew, the other for those refreshing showers; both revenged idolatries with the sword—the one upon the worshippers of the golden calf, the other upon the four hundred Baalites; both quenched the drought of Israel—the one out of the rock, the other out of the cloud; both divided the waters—the one of the Red Sea, the other of Jordan; both of them are forewarned of their departure; both must be fetched away beyond Jordan; the body of Elijah is translated, the body of Moses is hid; what Moses doth by his rod, Elijah doth by his mantle; with that he smites the waters, and they, as fearing the Divine power which wrought with the prophet, run away from him and stand on heaps, leaving their dry channel for the passage of those awful feet.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 9. The reply of Elisha has been much misunderstood. As early as the days of Theodoret, these words were interpreted: "Let a gift of the spirit of prophecy twice as large as thine own rest upon me." Luther renders them: "Let thy spirit be double in me;" and Krummacher, adopting the same view, justifies it by saying, "The spirit of Elisha as an evangelical spirit was twice as great as the spirit of Elijah as a legal spirit." In all humility, we venture to differ from this interpretation, considering it entirely opposed to Elisha's

humility, entirely out of the power of Elijah to grant, and contradicted by the history of Elisha himself, in whom we have no proof of such superlative endowment. Literally translated the language of Elisha would run, "Let there be a mouthful or ration of two with thy spirit to me"—the reference being to the inheritance of the first-born son among the Jews, who, by reason of his primogeniture, was to have a double portion, or the ration of two, among his brethren, which peculiar phraseology was only a Hebrew synonym or figurative expression for being served heir and successor to the father of the dwelling. The request of Elisha, then, was simply this, that Elijah, the great father or head of the prophetic school, would in leaving the world complete the symbolic act begun in the field of Abel-meholah, by constituting him the inheritor of his position in the land of Israel, with authority to continue the work which he had begun.—*Howat.*

Verses 11, 12. The Divine estimate of Elijah and his work. Seen—I. In the glorious method of his translation to heaven—a unique close to a unique career. II. In the testimony Elisha was enabled to bear to an idolatrous nation as to Elijah's miraculous exit—the man whose messages had been despised was honoured by a removal unlike that of ordinary men. III. In the provision made for carrying on Elijah's work by a competent successor.

Verse 11. "And it came to pass as they still went on and talked." A memorable conversation. 1. If we consider the characters of the talkers. 2. The probable themes discussed. 3. The abrupt and extraordinary manner of its termination.

— This translation of Elijah to heaven, and the appearance of the chariot and horses of fire, like other similar events of Old Testament Scripture, teach the existence of another world beyond us, unseen by the natural eye; a realm whose inhabitants and hierarchies and orders of ministries are numerous beyond all computation. But Elijah entered this heaven without tasting death, or at least by a marvellous transformation. The human body, with its earthly modes of life, must be unsuited to the heavenly state, and hence we suppose, in harmony with the Scripture, that at the moment of his separation from Elisha, Elijah was changed, as in the twinkling of an eye, and ascended with a renewed spiritualized body, made compatible with the nature of heavenly existence. Thus has he become a representative of those saints who shall not die, but be changed at the coming of the Lord (1 Cor. xv. 51, 52; 1 Thess. iv. 17). It is contrary to the evident import of this account of Elijah's departure, and contrary to the teachings of other Scriptures, to assume that his body must have become suddenly decomposed and dissolved into dust, or that it was thrown down again, as some of the sons of the prophets thought, on some mountain, or in some valley, a lifeless corpse (verse 16). Elijah truly ascended bodily to heaven, but his body underwent such a spiritualizing change as fitted it for the heavenly life; hence our doctrine that man is all immortal, body as well as spirit.—*Whedon.*

Verse 12. In this inextricable interweaving of fact and figure, it is enough to mark how fitly such an act closes such a life. "My father, my father," Elisha cried, "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." So Elijah has stood a sure defence to his country against all the chariots and horsemen that were ever pouring in upon them from the surrounding nations. So he now seemed, when he passed away, lost in the flames of the steeds and the car that swept him from the earth, as in the fire of his own unquenchable spirit—in the fire that had thrice blazed around him in his passage through his troubled earthly career. According to the Jewish legends, he was at his birth wrapped in swaddling bands of fire,

and fed with flames. During the whole of his course "he rose up as a fire, and his word blazed as a torch." And as in its fiery force and energy, so in its mystery, the end corresponded to the beginning. He had appeared in the history, we know not whence, and now he is gone in like manner. The ascension or assumption of Elijah stands out, alone in the Jewish history, as the highest representation of the end of a great and good career; of death as seen under its noblest aspect; as the completion and crown of the life which had preceded it; as the mysterious shrouding of the departed within the invisible world. By a sudden stroke of storm and whirlwind—or, as we may almost literally say of the martyrs of old, by chariots and horses of fire—the servants of God pass away. We know not where they rest; we may search high and low, in the height of the highest peak of our speculations, or in the depth of the darkest shadow of the valley of death. Legend upon legend may gather round them, as upon Elijah; but the Sacred Record itself is silent. One only mode or place there is where we may think of them, as of Elijah—in those who come afterwards in their power and spirit, or in that One Presence which still brings us near to them, in the Mount of Transfiguration, in communion with the beloved of God.—*Stanley.*

Verses 13-15. The conscious endowment of Divine power. 1. *Tested and verified* (verses 13, 14). 2. *Publicly recognized.* "And when the sons of the prophets saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." 3. *Commands the reverence of the good.* "And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

Verse 14. The Lord God of Elijah. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" 1. *This inquiry is suggested amid scenes of temporal embarrassment.* Next in importance to the consecration of our life, and the cultivation of our intellect, is the honourable conflict in which we are engaged for the needed finance, the current sustenance. Its importance secured for it a distinct and prominent place in the model prayer. He on whose shoulders the responsibility of a home rests has the highest sanction for praying, as the morning dawns, "Father God, feed me and mine; give us this day our daily bread; continue to us our nightly shelter; keep the fire aglow on our hearth, and the bread sufficient, if not abundant, in our cupboard. And when Satan has suggested that the monetary obligation, when due, would not be met, and the bread, when needed, would not be found in the store, then the cruise of oil and the barrel of meal have yielded the required impetus. The mist has cleared away, the gathering clouds have dispersed, as the question has ascended, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?'"

2. *This inquiry has been suggested when, disconcerted by current guiles, the corruptions of society,* you shrank from a task which seemed to have the absorbed attention and consecrated energy of but a few. You were lavish of health and life, in almost laborious loneliness. And so circumstanced, you were tempted to suspend further efforts; and, in comparative solitude, bewail the apathy of the Church, and the lapsed state of the world. But you thought of the cave near Horeb, which rung with the recalling cry of Jehovah, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" And from that date you have never indulged in any ideas about leaving your official duties, and passing to comfortable quietude. Hiding in the caves has been out of the question. You mean now to toil on, until at the close of a laborious life you may gratefully exclaim, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

3. *The inquiry is suggested by the controversies upon which we are cast,* the disputes with the settlement of which we may have something to do. The nineteenth century has certainly its Mount Carmel. Upon truths which we hold as sacred there is poured such apparent and, in some instances, rather acute contempt. Little is

spared. Venerable names are traduced. Hoary facts are changed into airy fictions. A volume the most real is now regarded as the most mythical. Under these circumstances what is our *main*, our *supreme* want? Our *secondary* one is a body of Christian scholars and scientists who shall be quite equal to current discussions. Is the development theory obtruded? Then we want our Hugh Miller, who shall show us that different links in the development chain are wanting, and that, therefore, the very rocks thwart the whole theory. To meet the sophistries of Hume we need the logical acumen and elaborate learning of Campbell, Chalmers, and Wardlaw. To meet the detractors, coarse and scholarly, of our adorable Redeemer, we need our Pye-Smith, with his "Testimony," and our Hengstenberg, with his "Christology." But while this is our subordinate want, we have a paramount, a supreme one, which no logic, however conclusive, and no scholarship, however extensive, can supply. We want the influence of the Holy Spirit—the power from on high—the baptism of fire. The fire on Mount Carmel settled the controversy, and nothing else would have done it. We may have everything else, but without this we may inevitably fail. Elijah reared the altar, he put the wood in order, he adjusted the sacrifice; but it was the descending fire which indicated the Divine honour, which clothed and crowned the whole. So we may build beautiful places of worship; we may have an erudite ministry, and most ornate and enamouring music; but that which is essential to the success of the whole is the cloud of the Divine glory over the mercy-seat.

4. *This inquiry is suggested when, having done with life's responsibilities and controversies, we arrive at the mystic river—the Jordan of death.* Elisha, having wrapped his mantle around him, recalled those miraculous interpositions which were associated with the life of his prophetical predecessor; then the waters, having been smitten, "they parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over." And are we to ford the river unescorted? Are we to die alone? Alone! "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" About the *last* hour, however, be not *over* anxious. Its security is guaranteed. Be most anxious about the current one. As they speed on, gather up the moments, as if they were grains of gold. Be loyal to the last. Evade no foe. Shrink from no encounter. You are in the *militant* Church; let the standard, therefore, be planted; let the banner wave. The clash of arms and the din of war will soon be hushed—hushed for ever. You will be more than a conqueror through the blood of the Lamb. Soon you will have arrived at the gates of pearl. Soon there will be thrown over your whole life the accurate interpretations of eternity. At eventide there shall be light. May you have, during the vicissitudes of your pilgrimage, guidance which is unerring; and in death, underneath you, may there be the everlasting arms—the everlasting arms of "the Lord God of Elijah."—*Homiletic Quarterly.*

Verse 15. It was not the outside of Elijah they were wont to stoop unto with so much veneration; it was his spirit, which, since they now find in another subject, they entertain with equal reverence; no envy, no emulation, raiseth up their stomach against Elijah's servant; but, where they see eminent graces, they are willingly prostrate. Those that are truly gracious do no less rejoice in the riches of others' gifts, than humbly undervalue their own. These men were trained up in the schools of the prophets—Elisha at the plough and cart; yet now they stand not upon terms of their worth, and his meanness, but meekly fall down before him whom God had honoured. It is not to be regarded who the man is, but whom God would make him. The more unlikely the means are, the more is the glory of the workman. It is the praise of a holy ingenuity to magnify the graces of God wherever it finds them.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 16-18.

THE MYSTERIOUSNESS OF THE DIVINE ACTIONS.

I. A severe trial of faith. The sons of the prophets were slow to believe that Elijah had so utterly vanished as to return no more. It is true that one moment they saw him in company with Elisha; the next Elisha was alone, and their great leader was nowhere to be seen. Still it might be only another of the many sudden, abrupt disappearances which had marked Elijah's erratic career. Besides, if the spirit had ascended to heaven, his body might have been dropped on some mountain side, or into the depths of some valley; and this should, if possible, be recovered, and reverently buried. Elisha's account of the great prophet's exit only increased the mystery, and they wearied him with speculations and suggestions. Faith must be prepared to take much on trust. Where there is no mystery, there is no faith. "Trials," says F. W. Robertson, "bring man face to face with God—God and he touch; and the flimsy veil of bright cloud that hung between him and the sky is blown away; he feels that he is standing outside the earth, with nothing between him and the Eternal Infinite."

II. Provokes diligent inquiry. The commonplaces of to-day were the mysteries of yesterday. The phenomena of nature, which to our fore-fathers were occasions of superstitious dread, are to us familiar friends, and our most valuable servants. Discoveries have been made by the diligent investigator which would have remained unknown secrets, and are secrets still, to the indolent and indifferent. Mystery piques curiosity, and curiosity keeps alive the investigating faculty. The more mystery there is surrounding a subject, the more eager is the earnest student to solve it.

III. Not always fathomed by the most laborious human endeavours. The search of the fifty strong men among the mountains of Gilead was fruitless: they found no trace of the missing Elijah, and they were compelled to accept the testimony of Elisha without further question. Much has been revealed to the diligent seeker after truth, there is much that is yet wrapped in mystery. We cannot know everything about every truth. Revelation is necessarily limited by two things: by the Divine will—there is nothing to impel the Divine Being to reveal Himself beyond what He *wills* to do—and by our human capacity. However effulgent the revelation on God's part, its comprehension is necessarily limited on our part. We soon come to the extreme boundary of the known, and vainly we wave our hand in the darkness of the unknown. Much as we may discover by persevering study, more yet remains undiscovered. The pleasures of inquiry and discovery are endless. The investigation of all truth is ennobling, but none more so than the contemplation of those redemptive truths which, like the stars, their fittest emblems, fix the eye above in the very act of vision; a countless procession of brightness and wonder, lights visible to the humblest eye, yet fit to exercise the thoughts of angels: their full grandeur to be approached only when we shall have passed the grave, and, not less than sons of God, shall be free to enter into the mystery and magnificence of heaven.

LESSONS:—1. *The mystery of Divine truth is no sufficient reason for rejecting it.* 2. *The truth essential to salvation is plainly revealed.* 3. *More mysteries are solved by faith than by the most daring unbelief.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 16-18. An obstinate incredulity. I. Is dissatisfied with the most reliable testimony. II. Constructs theories of its own (v. 16). III. Persists in having its own way, notwithstanding repeated efforts to persuade to the contrary (v. 17). IV. Suffers ignominious defeat (v. 18).

— How many, especially young and inexperienced persons, will not be dissuaded from their opinions, views, and doubts, and will not heed the words of their teachers and parents, who have the best intentions towards them, and far more experience. They must become wise by bitter experience, and then bear to their shame, "Did I not say unto you, Go not?"

Verse 18. Some men are best satisfied when they have wearied themselves in their own ways. Nothing will teach them wit but disappointment. Their painful error leads them to a right conceit of Elijah's happier transportation. Those that would find Elijah, let them aspire to the heavenly paradise. Let them follow the high steps of his sincere faithfulness, strong patience, undaunted courage, fervent zeal, and constant obedience. Then God shall send the fiery chariot of death to fetch them up to that heaven of heavens where they shall triumph in everlasting joys.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 19-22.

The Healed Waters a Symbol of the Efficacy of the Gospel.

It is a proof of the confidence Elisha has already won that the dignitaries of the city came to consult him about a matter of great public concern; they believed he could cure the malefic waters. How potent is the influence of a good man! It is in times of distress and difficulty that his neighbours discover his real value. The transactions related in this paragraph may be used to symbolize the power of the Gospel to heal the poisoned waters of humanity. Observe—

I. Humanity enjoys many privileges. "The situation is pleasant." All travellers agree in representing the site of Jericho as exceedingly beautiful; its external surroundings were all that could be desired. So man's position in the world has its peculiar advantages. Scenes of beauty and of grandeur meet his gaze in every direction. He is rich with the wealthy accumulations of the historic past. He is surrounded by living examples of noble enterprise and chivalry. He is on the current of an ever-advancing civilization. Opportunities of usefulness open invitingly at every step, and there is everything to call out and sustain his best energies. Life on earth is a grand opportunity which, wisely used, will be fruitful in everlasting good.

II. Humanity is infected with a dangerous and fatal malady. "The water is naught, and the ground barren." In the fairest prospect there is some deformity; in the clearest and brightest crystal we may detect a flaw. So the beauties of Jericho were shadowed by the sufferings and disappointment of its inhabitants. The water was bad, and the land unfruitful. So is it with man. The springs of his being are poisoned with sin. Every part of his nature is tainted: "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." The fatal malady infects every stream, disorders every project, blackens every prospect, chills every aspiration, withers every hope. The soil of the heart is barren, and every attempt to bring forth the fruit of righteousness is abortive.

III. The Gospel provides the power to heal humanity of its malady. 1. *It is a Divine provision.* "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters." The healing power was not in Elisha, or in the cruse or the salt; but in God. So the new cruse of the Gospel, and the salt of Christian doctrine, would be ineffectual to heal humanity of its evils without the permeating presence and active power of God. We should be careful, like Elisha, to give to God all the glory of His own work. Man cannot cure himself, any more than the broken pitcher can repair itself. 2. *It is efficacious.* "So the waters were healed." The prophet cast the salt into the spring of the waters. The fountain being healed, all its streams participated in the cure. So the Gospel begins its restorative work in the heart, the fountain head of human life. True reformation should ever begin at the source of evil; it will then be thorough and permanent. "If God cast into the fountain of our hearts but one cruseful of the salt of His spirit, we are whole; no thought can pass between the receipt and the remedy." If we have not streams of Divine blessing in abundance, we may have enough to refresh, to heal, and fertilise.

If not full showers of rain, yet, Lord,
A little pearly dew afford;
A little, if it come from thee,
Will be of great avail to me.

LESSONS:—1. *The gospel has a remedy for every evil.* 2. *The remedy must be prayerfully sought.* 3. *Must be believingly applied.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 19-22. As we see in the translation of Elijah a type of Christ's ascension into heaven, so may we also see in the subsequent career of Elisha a type of the holy apostolic church, clothed with the spirit of the Master, and working even greater miracles than he.

Verse 19. The material facts thus combined and contrasted are very suggestive to the mind of spiritual conditions. The situation in which we stand is pleasant. While so many fair regions of the earth lie in spiritual darkness, the full and blessed light of God's truth shines upon our habitations. We have the written word of truth—we have the uttered word of truth—one of the first sounds that entered our infant ears was that name which is above every name; and not a day passes in which, under some form or other, we may not see or hear the words of salvation. What situation could be more pleasant, more favourable to our spiritual progress? Surely our city stands upon the delectable mountain whence on any clear day we may have fair prospects of the goodly land that lies beyond the swelling Jordan. Yet, pleasant as all things seem, it is not well with us. "The ground is barren."—*Kitto.*

— A crook in every lot. 1. True of the most pleasantly situated city. 2. Of the most highly favoured nation. 3. In the history of every individual life.

Verse 20. The injurious property and effect was not taken from the water by the salt poured in; for even if the salt actually possessed this power, a whole spring could not be corrected by a single dish of salt, even for one day, much less for a longer time or for ever. The pouring in of the salt was a symbolic act with which Elisha accompanied the word of the Lord, by which alone the spring was healed. Salt, on account of its power of preserving from putrescence and decay, is the symbol of incorruptibility and of

life removing death. The new dish was also a symbol of purity and inviolateness.—*Keil.*

Verse 21. In a place where the spiritual fountains are poisoned, and the people receive to drink, from all the pulpits and school-teachers' desks, not the water which streams forth unto eternal life, but the death-draught of that modern babble of deceit and falsehood, there is a more deadly curse upon the land than that which once lay upon the district of Jericho. May the Lord of Elisha raise up those who shall carry the healing salt also into these fountains.—*Krummacher.*

— Moral reformation. 1. *Begins in the soul*—"He went forth unto the spring of the waters." 2. *Is accomplished by human agency*—"And cast the salt in there." 3. *Is a divine work*—"Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters." 4. *Is thorough and permanent*—"There shall not be from thence any more death or barren land."

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 23-25.

The Doom of the Scoffer.

I. The scoffer reveals a spirit of hatred and opposition to that which is good. Bethel was the headquarters of the great apostasy—the home of idolatry. Here schools were established, in imitation of the schools of the prophets, to instruct the people in idolatrous practices, and to inflame their hearts with hatred towards Jehovah and His worship. Where people are taught to despise and detest that which is good, no wonder they are ever ready to indulge in profane, contemptuous, and splenetic scorn. 1. *Scoffing is too common a sin of depraved youth.* "There came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him." We are not to understand infantile or irresponsible children, but those who had attained to youthful manhood, as distinguished from the middle-aged and the old. Perhaps these young people were the pupils of a teacher of the calf worship at Bethel, and, meeting with Elisha as they came from school, they assailed him with the contempt and ridicule in which they had been too well instructed. Wicked and badly trained youth take delight in holding the truth up to derision and mockery; they make sport of the holiest things, and glory in their own wickedness—"Fools make a mock at sin." The scoffer is the lowest type of depravity; "the seat of the scornful" is the nearest seat to hell. 2. *To scoff at the servants of God is an insult to God himself*—"Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head." It is not likely that Elisha was really bald-headed, as he was then comparatively young. The word was applied to him out of pure contempt, and in a way that would be most insulting. It was "a term of great indignity with the Israelites—baldness being usually seen among them as the effect of the loathsome disease of leprosy. It was equivalent to calling him a mean and unworthy fellow—a social outcast. In this sense it is still used as a term of abuse in the farther East, and is often applied as such to men who have ample heads of hair." These profane mockers had heard that Elijah had been taken up to heaven, and they sneeringly expressed their wish that Elisha might share the same fate, and they would be well rid of him. But the sequel shows that Jehovah regarded the insult to His servant as directed against Himself. He is jealous for the character, reputation, and influence of His servants; he that "toucheth them, toucheth the apple of His eye" (Zech. ii. 8).

II. The scoffer may rouse the indignant threatening of the gentlest nature. "And he turned back and looked on them and cursed them in the name of the Lord."

How unlike the gentle, kindly, tender-hearted Elisha, as we have so far been led to regard him! It is more like the fierce outbreak of the fiery Eljah, the prophet of denunciation and wrath. But even the placid spirit of Elisha is aroused when the honour of His God is concerned. He cursed the mocking youths, "not from personal resentment, but under a Divine impulse, without which no prophet ever dared to pronounce a curse. He cursed, and that was all. He did not punish." The servant of God may patiently endure the scoffs and frowns and persecution of the world when they refer to himself only; but when the character of his God is maligned and His grandest work derided, the meekest become bold in vindicating the Divine glory. When Terantius, captain to the emperor Adrian, presented a petition that the Christians might have a temple to themselves in which to worship God apart from the Arians, the emperor tore the petition in pieces and threw it away, bidding the soldier to ask something for himself and it should be granted. Terantius modestly gathered up the fragments of the discarded petition, and said, with true nobility of mind, "If I cannot be heard in God's cause, I will never ask anything for myself."

III. The scoffer is sometimes signally punished. "And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood and tare forty and two children of them." The offence, writes Kitto, involving as it did a blasphemous insult cast upon one of the Lord's most signal acts, made a near approach to what in the New Testament is called the sin against the Holy Ghost. It became the Lord to vindicate His own honour among a people governed by sensible dispensations of judgment and of mercy; and it became Him to vindicate the character and authority of His anointed prophet at the outset of His high career. The pride, irreverence, and heartless disregard of the scoffer, will sooner or later meet with due recompense.

Hear the just doom, the judgment of the skies:
He that hates truth shall be the dupe of lies;
And he who *will* be cheated to the last,
Delusions, strong as hell, shall bind him fast.

LESSONS:—1. *Not the least evil of idolatry is that it produces a race of scoffers of the true God.* 2. *A scoffer is hardened against ordinary rebukes.* 3. *But ere long the scoffer meets with the just punishment of his sin.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 23, 24. The demoralizing effects of idolatry upon the young. I. It trains them in false ideas of God. II. It destroys their appreciation of the truly good. III. It inflates them with basest impertinence. IV. It exposes them to confusion and suffering.

Verse 23. Young people are always ready to make wanton sport of any peculiar appearance which they do not understand. The unripe behaviour of the young generation which is growing up, always forms a shadowy reflection of the shallow opposition in moral and religious ideas which exists in public opinion. The separate bearers and supporters of the truth which is deep, and hence misunderstood by the masses, are, for the most part, objects of blind scorn to wild youth. That which found expression against Elisha has also fallen upon many in later times. He who, in the exercise of his calling, goes up to perverted Bethel, must expect it.—*Cassel.*

Verse 24. As Elisha was not silent, so also now a faithful servant of the Lord may not keep silent if young

people are brought up badly and godlessly. He ought not to let pass unnoticed their wickedness and impudence, and their contempt for that which is holy. It is his duty to warn them and their parents of the Divine punishment. Woe to the watchmen who are dumb watch-dogs, who cannot punish—who are lazy, and who are glad to lie and sleep.—*Lange.*

— O fearful example of Divine justice! This was not the revenge of an angry prophet, it was the punishment of a righteous judge. God and His seer looked through these children at the parents, at all Israel: he would punish the parents' misnurturing their children, to the contemptuous usage of a prophet, with the death of those children which they had mistaught. He would teach Israel what it was to misuse a prophet: and if he would not endure these contumelies unrevenged in the mouths of children, what vengeance was enough for aged persecutors? —*Bp. Hall.*

— So Dr. Whittington, returning from martyring a good woman at Chipping-Sadbury, was gored by a bull. Dr. Story, who narrated that he had burned so many heretics, was hanged at Tyburn for treason. Hemingius tells of a lewd fellow in Denmark, who, showing great contempt against a preacher, as he passed out of the church, was brained with a tile falling on him. Luther tells of another who, going to the fields to look to his sheep, after he had railed most bitterly against a godly minister, was found dead—his body being burned as black as coal. "Be not ye mockers, lest your bands be increased."—*Trapp.*

Verse 25. **The uses of retirement.** I. Is sometimes sought by the most active spirits. II. Affords an opportunity for study and preparation. III. Gives new strength to grapple with sin in its greatest strongholds.

— Whither dare not a prophet go when God calls him? Having visited the schools of the prophets, Elisha retires to Mount Carmel, and, after some holy solitariness, returns to the city of Samaria. He can never be a profitable seer that is either always or never alone. Carmel shall fit him for Samaria; contemplation for action. That mother city of Israel must needs afford him most work.—*Bp. Hall.*

CHAPTER III.

THE REVOLT AND DEFEAT OF MOAB.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Jehoram, the son of Ahab—See on chap. i. 17. The more distinctive name of this king, together with a helpful chronological statement, will be found in chap. viii. 16. In character and conduct he was only comparatively better than his parents: bad, but not so bad as they. Verse 2. He put away the image of Baal—There were "*images*" (chap. x. 26) in the house of Baal, which Ahab erected (1 Kings xvi. 32) in Samaria; but there was one distinctive (probably very vast) *statue*, called here, and in chap x. 27, "*the* image." Probably those מַצֵּבוֹת were *wooden* images; whereas this מַצְּבַת הַבַּעַל was a statue in stone or metal. Verse 4. An annual tribute on Moab—The custom is common in the East to pay custom or taxes with the products of the land. For a Moabitish king, with rich pastures in his own territory, and also in the Arabian wilderness, this was but a small tribute to pay. Verses 6 and 7. Confederation of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat—This was effected "*at the same time*" (verse 6) as Jehoram began his reign and Moab rebelled; and the confederation was with the design of crushing Moab. The king of Israel "numbered," or mustered, a considerable army from his subjects throughout "all Israel," and invited the king of Judah to join him in the campaign. Verse 8. The way through the wilderness of Edom—*i. e.*, not crossing the Jordan, but marching down by the Dead Sea to its southern extremity, and thence up through the wilderness, and over the mountains of Edom,

approaching Moab from the south. Moab was best fortified on its northern boundary; besides which, to reach Moab by a northerly route they would have had to risk a collision with the Syrians, whereas Edom was at this time ruled by a deputy, whom Jehoshaphat had appointed (1 Kings xxii. 47). Verse 9. Seven days' journey—It was a weary route over the desert region south of the Dead Sea, while also "the deep rocky valley of Ashy" (*Keil*) was most difficult of penetration. They found, to their distress, that the Wady of this valley was dry. Verses 10 and 11. Jehoram despairs; Jehoshaphat seeks a prophet of Jehovah. Verse 11. Which poured water on the hands of Elijah—*i. e.*, "who was about Elijah daily as his servant, and who is certainly the most reliable prophet, since he [Elijah] is gone" (*Thenius*). The phrase, פֹּה אֱלִישָׁע, "*Here is Elisha*," means that he was in the camp or close at hand. Perhaps, as Keil suggests, the prophet, led by Divine impulse, had come near the armies to guide their kings in the hour of embarrassment and despair. Elisha's ministry might now convert Jehoram from idolatrous sympathies, by showing him the true God. Verse 13. Elisha said to Jehoram, "What have I to do with thee?"—Elisha meets him with sternness to rebuke his pride and impiety, and then ironically refers him to the idols for which he had deserted Jehovah. "Nay"—אַל—*i. e.*, *not*—not so; do not so answer and refuse me; or, It will not help me to go to the prophets of Baal. Verse 15. Now bring me a minstrel—To soothe and elevate his mind into preparedness to heed the voice of God's spirit within him. On יַד יְהוָה, "the hand of the Lord," see Notes on 1 Kings xviii. 46. Verse 19. Mar every good piece of land—כָּאַב, to inflict pain; grieve the land. Verse 20. Came water by the way of Edom—Occasioned by sudden rains supernaturally given, which fell on the mountain heights of Edom, and quickly filled the Wady, and overflowed into the "ditches." Verse 23. This is blood—For the rancour between the kings of Israel and Judah was well known; hence the Moabites supposed they had slaughtered each other in some quarrel on their march. Thus deluded by the sight of the water—reddened by the sun's rays, or with the colour of the earth into which they had dug (verse 16), the Moabites hastened unprepared, into the hands of their foes. Verse 25. קִיר דַּרְשֶׁת—Called Kir Moab (Isa. xv. 1). It was the capital city, and fortified—now called *Kerak*. Verse 27. Eldest son, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall—In the sight of the assailing armies; and this spectacle of horror roused in the allies of Israel such revulsion, because that their support of Israel had driven the king of Moab to this dreadful act, that they fell back from the siege, and left Israel to its own fortunes.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-8.

Partial Reformation.

I. That partial reformation is brought about by association with the good (verse 1). This verse reminds us of the intimacy existing between Jehoram, the son of the idolatrous Ahab, and the God-fearing Jehoshaphat. It was by the mediation of the latter monarch that the war-like rancour so long cherished between Israel and Judah was subdued, and more friendly intercourse encouraged (1 Kings xxii. 44). The company of the good, if it does not change the character of the wicked, greatly modifies their conduct. The influence of a holy life makes itself felt in the most abandoned society. Example is more potent than precept. The power of Jesus when on earth consisted more in what He did than in what He said—more in the significance of His conduct than in the fulness of His argument. "Far more of God was revealed in what He was, in what He did, and in what He suffered, than in what He taught." If all the good withdrew from society, one of the most powerful moral restraints would be removed from the wicked, and the world would soon become a very Tophet of unbearable suffering.

II. That partial reformation is seen in the abolition of the grosser forms of sin. "He put away the image of Baal that his father had made" (verse 2).

The worship of the Tyrian Baal was encouraged by Ahab and Jezebel to such an extent as at once to degrade and disgust the people. It was a national scandal. Jehoram did his best to wipe out that disgrace, and to dry up that fountain of popular pollution. So far good. It is a gain to the community when vice is prevented from flaunting itself before the public gaze. If it cannot be at once abolished, let it be narrowed to the smallest space and reduced to the minimum of mischief. Partial reformation of abuses is better than leaving things as they are. The vice in our large cities, notwithstanding all attempts to hide and circumscribe it, is something appalling. It is said that there are in London 10,000 prostitutes—a procession a mile long, walking double file—all somebody's daughters; and there are 20,000 thieves, making two more miles of that dread procession. What would be the effect on public morality if all these criminals were allowed unchecked and unrestricted scope?

III. That partial reformation does not deliver from sins which have become established by a generation of wicked examples. "Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam" (verse 3). How prolific is the progeny of a single sin—how tenacious the effects of one evil example! It requires more than ordinary courage to break away from sins that are hereditary and that have been fastened on a nation by long usage and enforced by kingly example and authority. No partial and half-hearted efforts will avail. "Men do less than they ought, unless they do all that they can." Only by Divine help can a thorough and lasting reformation be effected.

LESSONS:—1. *Any efforts after sincere reformation are commendable.* 2. *Nothing short of a thorough reformation can be acceptable to God.* 3. *The evil of a bad example may be counteracted by a good one.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 2, 3. If we do in truth tear down a statue of Baal or two, and adhere nevertheless to the sins of Jeroboam, and to his calf images—to those ordinances which for political reasons have been introduced and established in the church contrary to the will of the Lord—what will it help us? He who, for himself, abstains from that which is opposed to God's word and commandment, but continues to tolerate it in those who are connected with him, or subject to him, shows thereby that he is not in earnest in his own obedience to God, and that his principles are deduced only from external considerations and relations.—*Lange.*

Verse 2. A vacillating spirit. I. Weakens kingly authority. II. Is easily discouraged in a work of religious reform. III. Is hampered by the influence of evil parental example. IV. Never accomplishes anything great.

— Even into the most wicked families it pleases God to cast His powerful restraints, that all are not equally vicious. It is no news to see lewd men make scruple of some sins. The world were not to live in, if all sins were affected by all. It is no thanks to Ahab and Jezebel that their son is no Baalite. As no good is traduced from parents, so not all evil; there is an Almighty Hand that stops the foul current of nature at His pleasure. No idolater can say that his child shall not be a convert.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 4-20.

THE POWER OF A GOOD MAN IN EXTREMITY.

On the death of Ahab the Moabites rebelled against Israel, and refused any longer to pay the heavy tribute they had been accustomed to render. During the short and unwarlike reign of the unfortunate Ahaziah, nothing was done to chastise the Moabites for their revolt; but as soon as Jehoram seized th sceptre, he organized an expedition against Moab to compel the payment of th accustomed tribute. The whole undertaking would have ended in terrible disaster and loss, but for the timely intervention of the despised Elisha. It is in extremity that man discovers his own helplessness, and learns to venerate and love that God who is a present help in trouble.

I. That the most carefully planned enterprise may be unexpectedly reduced to great extremity (verses 4—9). Israel, Judah, and Edom united their armies, and marched, a formidable host, against the revolted Moabites, led in person by the monarch of each nation. A route was selected which, by attacking the Moabites from the South, was intended to take them by surprise, as they would hardly expect an attack from Israel in that quarter. The plot was well laid—success was certain—the Moabites would be driven into immediate submission; when suddenly the advancing host found itself menaced by a danger more distressing than that of the mightiest army—there was no water for man or beast! Of what avail now was their multitude of warriors, and the imposing splendour of their equipment? Their numbers aggravated the suffering, and their proud display added to the ignominy of the failure. The most consummate strategist is often baffled by unlooked-for difficulties. History furnished a melancholy example in Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia and his disastrous retreat from Moscow.

II. That in a time of extremity the help of a good man is anxiously sought (verses 10-12). 1. *Heathenism is powerless to help in extremity.* Jehoram yields at once to despair, and can see no possible way of deliverance (verse 6). What an acknowledgment of the imbecility of his gods! Idolatry had no comfort for the sorrowing, no resources in times of difficulty. It breeds a spirit of sullen and forlorn fatalism. 2. *The worshipper of Jehovah knows where to go for help* (verse 11). How different is the conduct of the two kings! Jehoram wrings his hands in utter helplessness; Jehoshaphat calls for a prophet. The believer in Jehovah has resources to fall back upon in adversity of which the world knoweth not. A tender-hearted doctor once said to a patient who was suffering excruciating pain, "It is a brave heart that bears all this so grandly." "Ah! no, Doctor," was the meek and gentle response, "it is not the brave heart at all; *Jesus bears it all for me.*" 3. *In extremity goodness commands the homage of greatness.* "So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him" (verse 12). They did not summon Elisha into the royal presence, as was the case with Micaiah (1 Kings xxii. 9). They were in distress. It was not a time to stand on ceremony, or to make a vain display of royal pomp and greatness. They eagerly and humbly sought the help of the man of God. True worth will triumph in the end, however much it may be ignored and vilified; and will command the respect even of its enemies.

III. That a time of extremity affords an opportunity for a good man to exalt the Lord. 1. *He is fearless in reproving wrong.* Elisha repudiates Jehoram's claim to any consideration, and tells him to go "to the prophets of his

father and to the prophets of his mother" (verse 13). He has already discovered the powerlessness of his national idol; and keenly as he must have felt the rebuke of the man of God at this time, he could not but admit its justice. No opportunity for reproving wrong should be neglected, and circumstances sometimes arise in which such neglect would be specially reprehensible. 2. *He acknowledges the good in whomsoever found.* "Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look towards thee, nor see thee" (verse 14). One sovereign is condemned, while another is commended, as if to show that no disrespect is intended to the royal office, but that sin must be reproved, whether found in the person of the sovereign, or in that of the meanest subject. "What shall not be done for a Jehoshaphat? For his sake shall those two other princes, and their vast armies, live and prevail. It is in the power of one good man to oblige a world. We receive true though insensible favours from the presence of the righteous. Next to being good, it is happy to converse with them that are so; if we be not better by their example, we are blest by their protection." 3. *He recognizes the Divine source of all true help* (verse 15). Elisha calls for music to soothe and tranquillize his mind, and prepare himself for the reception of Divine communications. He was fully aware that God, and God only, could render help in such an extremity. Help is found, not in the multitude of an host, not in the power of the crown, not in the charms of song and the grandeur of sacrifice, not in the goodness and greatness of the individual instrument, but only in God. This cannot be too frequently iterated, or too constantly acknowledged. 4. *He is favoured with revelations of the Divine intentions* (verses 16—19). Not only is water promised to relieve their present distress, but the kings are assured of victory over the Moabites. The good man is privileged to know more of the Divine mind than can be understood by the ungodly. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will shew them His covenant" (Psa. xxv. 14).

IV. That Divine aid in extremity is not sought in vain (verse 20). It seemed very unlikely that the dry channels of the Edom valley should be filled with water. The air was still, the sky was clear, not a shred of rain-cloud was visible; and the work of the busy multitude in digging trenches seemed a mockery. Faith in Elisha and in the God of Elisha was put to the test. Evening sank into night, and night gave place to morning. But "at the hour of the morning sacrifice, no sooner did the blood of that oblation gush forth, than the streams of water gushed forth into their new channels, and filled the country with a refreshing moisture. Elijah fetched down his fire at the hour of the evening sacrifice; Elisha fetched up his water at the hour of the morning sacrifice. How seasonably doth the wisdom of God pick out that instant wherein He might at once answer both Elisha's prophecy and His people's prayers." The Lord will never disappoint His people's confidence. It is in extremity that He most signally displays His power and goodness.

LESSONS:—1. *Extremity reveals the helplessness of man.* 2. *Calls for special Divine interference.* 3. *Teaches the most wholesome lessons.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 4. When kings and lords fall away from God, then their subjects must fall away from them. And when the fathers are disobedient to God, the children and servants must also be disobedient to them, for their punishment.

Verses 10, 11. What are the greatest monarchs of the world, if they

want but water to their mouths! What can their crowns and plumes and rich arms avail them, when they are abridged but of that which is the drink of beasts? With dry tongues and lips do they now confer of their common misery. Jehoram deplores the calamity into which they were fallen; Jehoshaphat asks for a prophet. Every man can bewail a misery; every man cannot find the way out of it. Not without some specialty from God does Elisha follow the camp; else that had been no element for a prophet. Little did the good king of Judah think that God was so near him. Purposely was this holy seer sent for the succour of Jehoshaphat and his faithful followers when they were so far from dreaming of their delivery that they knew not of a danger. It would be wide with the best men if the eye of Divine Providence were not open upon them, when the eye of their care is shut towards it. How well did Elisha in the wars! The strongest squadron of Israel was within that breast; all their armour of proof had not so much safety and protection as his mantle.—*Bp. Hall.*

— In need and distress the state of a man's heart is brought to light. Jehoram falls into despair, he does not know what counsel to take, nor how to help himself. Instead of seeking the Lord and calling to Him for help, he accuses Him and cast the reproach upon Him that He means to destroy three kings at once. Jehoshaphat, who had always bent his heart to seek God (2 Chron. xix. 3), does not wring his hands in despair, but is quiet and composed. He thinks within himself, The Lord has neither now, nor ever, withdrawn Himself from His people. Therefore he trusts, and asks for a prophet of the Lord.—*Lange.*

Verse 10. Despair. I. A natural fruit of idolatry. II. Shows the helplessness of man. III. Is ever ready to throw the blame of misfortune on others.

Verse 12. "The word of the Lord is with him." A true prophet. I. Is easily recognised by all lovers of truth. II. Is invested with Divine authority. III. Is eagerly and humbly consulted in time of need.

— So long as men are free from distress and danger, they ask nothing about the ministers of the gospel, they take no notice of them, they wish to have nothing to do with them, they throw their faithful warnings to the wind; but when an accident or a death occurs, then they are glad to see the despised preacher, and they desire to make use of his services and his prayers. Three kings descend from their elevation and come humbly and with petitions to the man who was once a servant of Elijah, of whom they had not even known so much as that he had joined the expedition. So now emperors and kings bow the knee before Him who came to His own and His own received Him not, who did not have a place to lay His head, but who is now confessed to be the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.—*Wurt. Summ.*

Verses 13, 14. The vain pretences of idolatry. I. Truthfully rebuked. II. Unmistakably apparent in times of difficulty. III. Invalidate all claim for help.

Verse 13. How sharply dares the man of God to chide his sovereign, the king of Israel! The liberty of the prophets was no less singular than their calling; he that would borrow their tongue must show their commission. As God reproved kings for their sakes, so did not they stick to reprove kings for His sake. Thus much freedom they must leave to their successors, that we might not spare the vices of them whose persons we must spare.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Elisha stood before the Lord, the living God; Jehoram before the calf-god. That was not only a difference in religious views and opinions, but also an entirely different standpoint in life. Where there is a life in God, there there can be no fellowship with those who have denied and abandoned the living God: the two ways diverge directly and decidedly.

The relation in which a man stands to God is decisive for his relation to other men; it divides from some by a separation which is just as wide as the communion into which it brings him with others is close.—*Starke.*

Verse 14. He who has renounced God and His word can make no claim to esteem, even though he be a king. Fidelity to God and holding fast to His word are what make a man truly estimable, even though he were the poorest and lowliest. God does not let the righteous perish with the unrighteous; it rather comes to pass that, for the sake of a single righteous man, many godless persons are saved and preserved.—*Lange.*

Verse 15. The power of music. I. Soothes and tranquillizes the soul ruffled by contact with wrong. II. Prepares the heart for the reception of Divine blessing. III. Finds its loftiest use in the worship of God.

— Who wonders not to hear a prophet call for a minstrel in the midst of that mournful distress of Israel and Judah? Who would not have expected his charge of tears and prayers rather than of music? How unseasonable are songs to a heavy heart! It was not for their ears, it was for his own bosom, that Elisha called for music; that his spirits, after their zealous agitation, might be sweetly composed, and put into a meet temper for receiving the calm visions of God. None but a quiet breast is capable of Divine revelations; nothing is more powerful to settle a troubled heart than a melodious harmony.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 16—19. The Lord gives beyond what we pray for, beyond what we understand; He not only saves from need and danger, but He also gives the victory besides, out of pure undeserved grace. That is the fundamental feature of all Divine promises. The Lord not only does not deal with us according to our sins, but He gives us, besides that, the victory.—*Lange.*

Verse 16. Preparatory work. I. Necessary in all Divine arrangements. II. Must be done because commanded, not always because it is understood. III. Is an evidence of genuine faith. IV. Its value will be made apparent (verse 20).

Verses 17, 18. The methods of Divine relief. I. Often unseen and mysterious. II. Inevitably sure. III. Superabundant in supply (verse 18).

Verse 19. This is by no means a mere prophecy, as Wordsworth says, a simple prediction of what the allied armies would inflict on Moab; but a command as plain and positive as that by which he had formerly authorized the destruction of the idolatrous Canaanites. So utter a destruction of the Moabites did the Lord now authorize, that He even suspended the law of Deut. xx. 19, which forbade the destruction of the fruit trees of the enemy. This felling of the good trees would be to the surviving Moabites a memorable woe. Their ruined cities they might speedily rebuild, and unstop their wells, or dig new ones, and clear the land of stones; but years must pass before new fruit trees could be reared.—*Whedon.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 21-27.

The Danger of Trusting to Appearances.

I. Appearances may deceive those who fancy themselves well prepared for all contingencies (verse 21). Moab was aware of the approach of the invading army, and made the most careful and elaborate preparation to withstand it. All who were capable of bearing arms were marched to the frontier, and the

brave little nation, keenly watching every movement of the enemy, seemed determined to make a stout and desperate defence. It is important to prepare for the conflict of life; to be armed with the whole armour of God, and ever on our guard against the attack of our spiritual foes. But when we are best prepared we are liable to be misled by false appearances. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

II. Appearances may surprise the most cautious into committing a fatal blunder (verses 22-24). The shining of the early morning sun upon the water that filled the red earth-pits newly dug in the valley was mistaken for blood, and the Moabite leader, without taking any pains to verify his impression, jumped to the conclusion that the invading army had quarrelled, and what he saw shining in the sunlight was the blood of the slain. The word of command was given to advance, with the expectation that there was now nothing to do but to gather the spoil; but, too late to remedy it, the mistake of the Moabites was seen, and the compact little army that was strong and formidable when entrenched in its defences was speedily smitten and put to flight when it came into unexpected contact with the refreshed and well-armed Israelites. A false glitter did all the mischief. Alas! how many have been thus lured on to their destruction—the lover of strong drink, who has "looked upon the wine when it is red," until he has been fascinated with its mocking sheen and whelmed in its intoxicating vortex; the insatiate seeker of pleasure, who has been captivated by beauteous forms and pleasant sounds, and lost in giddy mazes; the grasping money-getter, for whom the glare of wealth has had an irresistible charm that has robbed him of the love of home, of kindred, and of honour. Enchanted with the glamour of false appearances, the generous have become penurious—the modest, bold—the careful, recklessly extravagant—the virtuous, base.

III. Trusting to appearances is often followed by the most ruinous consequences (verses 25-27). In this case we see an army utterly routed—a fruitful country made barren and desolate—and the only heir-apparent to a throne cruelly immolated by a distracted father. Many a promising nation has been brought to naught by yielding to the unholy lust of power, following the *ignis fatuus* of military glory, or craving for the crimsoned reputation of a tyrannical ascendency. The Sclavonians have a legend that a certain river was infested with a water-demon who had the power of assuming the shape of a cluster of red flowers waving and spreading themselves out in graceful and attractive forms on the surface of the water; but if the passer-by was tempted to put forth his hand to pluck one of the fragile blossoms, he was at once seized by invisible hands, dragged beneath the surface, and suffocated in the treacherous stream. It is perilous to trust to false appearances: it may lead to irreparable disaster. Many who have plucked the flower of pleasure have found it to contain a fatal sting.

LESSONS:—1. *Appearances have a great influence over us.* 2. *Are often false and fictitious.* 3. *Entice many into hopeless ruin.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 22-25. They rise soon enough to beguile themselves. The beams of the rising sun, glistening upon those vaporous and unexpected waters, carried in the eyes of some Moabites a semblance of blood. A few eyes were enough to fill all ears with a false noise: the deceived sense miscarries the imagination. Civil broils give just advantage to a common

enemy; therefore must the camps be spoiled, because the kings have smitten each other. Those who shall be deceived are given over to credulity: the Moabites do not examine either the conceit or the report, but fly in confusedly upon the camp of Israel, whom they find, too late, to have no enemies but themselves. As if death would not have hastened enough to them, they come to fetch it, they come to challenge it: it seizeth upon them unavoidably. They are smitten, their cities razed, their lands marred, their wells stopped, their trees felled, as if God meant to waste them but once.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 22-23. Optical illusions. I. May deceive the most wary. II. May lead to very serious mistakes. III. Should be carefully tested.

— The Divine aid by which the army of Israel was not only saved from destruction, but even obtained a complete victory over their enemies, consisted here not in a miracle of God surpassing the known laws of nature, but only in this, that God the Lord, as he had announced before by His prophet, introduced the laws of nature working to the determinate end in the predetermined way. As the suddenly appearing mass of waters was affected in a natural way by a violent rain in the distance, so also the illusion that was so fatal to the Moabites is explained in a natural way, indicated even in the text. From the red earth of the pits the water collected in them had assumed a red colour, which was considerably increased by the rays of the rising sun falling upon it, so that, seen from a distance, it must have appeared like blood. But the Moabites might be the less disposed to think of an optical illusion, as by their familiar acquaintance with the region they knew that the Wady had at that time no water, and they had seen or learned nothing of the rain which had fallen far from them in the Edomite mountains.—*Keil.*

Verse 23. The self-destruction of the allied armies of Moab, Ammon, and Edom (2 Chron. xx. 22-25) was still fresh in the minds of the Moabites; and knowing the enmity and jealousy existing between Judah and Israel, and confident that the Edomites were no fast friends of either party, they very naturally imagined, from the sight of what appeared so much blood, that the different kings had fallen out among themselves, and destroyed each other. They supposed it only remained for them to go, as did Jehoshaphat on that former occasion, and gather up the precious jewels and other spoil from among the dead bodies.

Verse 25. The terrible havoc of war. I. Sacrifices precious lives. II. Ruthlessly destroys the work of years. III. Exhausts the resources of a nation. IV. Checks national growth.

Verses 26, 27. No onsets are so furious as the last assaults of the desperate. The king of Moab, now hopeless of recovery, would be glad to shut up with a pleasing revenge. With seven hundred resolute followers, he rushes into the battle towards the king of Edom, as if he would bid death welcome might he but carry with him that despited neighbour, and now, mad with repulse, he returns; and, whether as angry with his destiny, or as barbarously affecting to win his cruel gods with so dear a sacrifice, he offers them, with his own hands, the blood of his eldest son in the sight of Israel, and sends him up in the smoke to those hellish deities. Oh, prodigious act, whether of rage or of devotion! What a hand had Satan over his miserable vassals! What marvel is it to see men sacrifice their souls in an unfelt oblation to these plausible tempters, when their own flesh and blood have not been spared! There is no tyrant like to the prince of darkness.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 26. Bravery. I. Called forth by the stress of circumstances. II. Challenges admiration irrespective of the cause it champions. III. Often unavailing.

Verse 27. The offering was doubt-

less made to the Moabitish god Chemosh, not to the God of Israel. Mesha supposed that his misfortunes were owing to the vengeance of his gods, whom he had in some way offended, and by this costly sacrifice he sought to propitiate them. Human sacrifices were common among many of the ancient heathen nations. The story of Iphigenia sufficiently shows the existence of the practice among the Greeks. It prevailed, also, among the Carthaginians and Phœnicians, and most of the nations in and around Palestine. Causing children to pass through the fire to Molech (chap. xiii. 10; Deut. xviii. 10) is an allusion to this abominable custom. Diodorus Siculus relates that when Agathocles was going to besiege Carthage, the people, seeing the extremities to which they were reduced, ascribed their misfortune to the anger of their god, in that they had latterly spared to offer him children nobly born, and had fraudulently put him off with the children of slaves and foreigners. To make an atonement for this crime, two hundred children of the best families in Carthage were at once offered in sacrifice, and no less than three hundred of the citizens voluntarily sacrificed themselves. Philo, in a fragment preserved by Eusebius, says: "It was a custom among the ancients, on occasions of great distress, for the rulers of a city or nation, instead of leaving the entire population to destruction, to sacrifice the beloved of their children as a ransom to the vengeful deities.—*Whedon.*

— Various accounts of the origin of human sacrifice have been given, but all are necessarily conjectural. It seems to us that the practice grew out of the notion that whatever was most costly and precious must needs be most acceptable as an offering to the gods; and it being established that the life of an animal was an acceptable offering, perverse ingenuity reasoned that the life of the human creature—the noblest of creatures—and his life-blood the most precious on earth, must be still more acceptable to heaven, still more valuable in the sight of the gods. This being the case, it further followed that the more illustrious, the more pure or exalted the person whose life was offered, the more proper still was the offering, and the more cogent its force in gratifying, soothing, or rendering propitious the stern powers that ruled the destinies of man. As to the precise object, it appears to us that in all, or nearly all, the cases fully known, these offerings were propitiatory at least, if not expiatory.—*Kitto.*

— The inhuman cruelty of heathenism. I. Immolates the choicest human victims. II. Is prompted by despair. III. Rouses the indignation of the righteous. IV. Is specially offensive to God.

— The departure of the Israelitish army in consequence of the human sacrifice of the king of Moab is a very remarkable sign of the difference between the fundamental opinions of the Israelites and of the heathen. Whereas, amongst almost all heathen peoples, sacrifice culminates in human sacrifice, and this is considered the most holy and most effective, in the Mosaic system, on the other hand, it is regarded as the greatest and most detestable abomination in the sight of God. It is forbidden, not merely from considerations of humanity, but also because, as the law declares with special emphasis, the sanctuary of the Lord is thereby defiled and His Holy Name profaned (Lev. xx. 1-5. xviii; 21). Human sacrifice stands in the most glaring contradiction to the revelation of God as the Holy One, in which character He was known in Israel alone; hence it was to be punished, without respite, by death. From the preceding narrative we see how deep roots the detestation of human sacrifice had struck in the conscience of the people. Neither the cultus founded by Jeroboam, nor that of Baal which Ahab had imported, with all its barbarism, had been able even to weaken this detestation. It was still so strong that a victorious army allowed itself to be led thereby to withdraw again from a land it had already subdued.—*Lange.*

CHAPTER IV.

THE MIRACLES OF ELISHA.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Two sons to be bondmen—The law entitled a creditor to the slavery or service of debtors till the year of Jubilee. Verse 2. Pot of oil—Gesenius suggests *unctio*—"oil for anointing," as the rendering of אָסוּךְ—instead of "pot"; no oil left for food, only enough for the anointing. Verse 3. Borrow not a few—She had *none*, should borrow *many*. Elisha had faith! Verse 8. Shunem, in the plain of Esdraelon, the base of Little Hermon, now *Sulam*. Verse 10. Chamber on the wall—Probably, as in 2 Sam. xviii. 33, a chamber in the *oleah*, or porch, usually appropriated to strangers; secluded and suitable for quiet retirement. Verse 13. I dwell among mine own people—*i. e.*, I do not need court notice, for my life is serenely simple, and I am satisfied with the esteem of my neighbours. Verse 16. Thou shalt embrace a son—Thus experiencing the same proof of Divine favour as was given to Sarah in her old age (Gen. xviii. 10-15). Verse 22. That I may run to the man of God—Not waiting to inform her husband of the reason of her mission, lest he should dissuade her, not doubting the miraculous help she would gain from the man of God. Verse 23. She said, It shall be well—Simply שָׁלוֹם, *peace*. With the one single word she likewise answers Gehazi (verse 26), the Eastern *Salam!* "it is well!" for she desired silence till she could tell all the truth to the servant of Jehovah. Verse 27. Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her—Gehazi thought her eager attitude an undue freedom, not sufficiently respectful towards his master. But fervid grief stays not at punctilios, "her soul is *bitter*." Verse 31. There was neither voice nor hearing—אֵין קוֹל וְאֵין קָשֶׁב—*i. e.*, the dead gave no sign of life, no response to the mere staff. The act was allowed to fail, in order to show that only through humble and dependent prayer could God's power be entreated. Verse 34. Lay upon the child—Following the method of his great predecessor, Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 21). Yet the effects differed, the resuscitation was by gradual and progressive stages. Verse 38. Sons of the prophets were sitting before him—This means, not that they lived in common with Elisha, but sat as scholars before him for teaching. Seethe pottage—A kind of thick broth of rice or meal, vegetables, and meat. Verse 40. There is death in the pot—Probably the "wild gourds" (verse 39) were the fruit of the *colocynth*, exceedingly bitter, and causing severe cholic. Freely eaten, they might cause death. Verses 42-44. Barley loaves, supernaturally multiplied—A foreshadowing of Christ's greater miracle of feeding the thousands. This man from Baal-shalisha brought the first fruits (Deut. xviii. 4, &c.) to Elisha as being "the man of God," rather than to the false priests of Baal who overran the land, but were judged by this man to be less worthy to act as Jehovah's representatives and receive his religious offering than the prophet.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-7.

THE MIRACULOUS SUPPLY OF OIL SYMBOLIC OF THE INEXHAUSTIBILITY OF DIVINE GRACE.

In this and the four following chapters we have a detailed account of the miracles of Elisha. We catch glimpses of the quiet, unobtrusive life spent in the schools of the prophets; and we cannot but observe the striking difference in the spirit and character of Elisha's ministry as contrasted with that of his predecessor. Elijah represented the whirlwind, the earthquake, the fire; Elisha, the still small voice—less terrible and imposing, but more extensively influential for good. As Stanley beautifully puts it: "The whole appearance of Elisha revealed the difference. The rough mantle of his master appears no more after its first display. He uses a walking staff like other grave citizens (verse 29) He was not secluded in mountain fastnesses, but dwelt in his own house in the royal city (chap. v. 9, 24; vi. 32; xiii. 17), or lingered amidst the sons of the prophets, within the precincts of ancient colleges, embowered amidst the shades of the beautiful woods which overhang the crystal spring that is still associated with his name; or was sought out by admiring

disciples in some tower on Carmel, or by the pass of Dothan; or was received in some quiet balcony, overlooking the plain of Esdraelon, where bed and table and seat had been prepared for him by pious hands. His life was not spent, like his predecessor's, in unavailing struggles, but in widespread successes. He was sought out, not as the enemy, but as the friend and counsellor, of kings. His deeds were not of wild terror, but of gracious, soothing, homely beneficence, bound up with the ordinary tenor of human life." The miracle related in this paragraph indicates the sympathy of the prophet with the troubles and needs of human life. In treating the miracle as *symbolic of the inexhaustibility of Divine Grace*, the following thoughts are suggested.

I. That humanity is reduced by sin to a state of moral bankruptcy and ruin. Like the widow in the narrative, we are hopelessly in debt, and have nothing wherewith to discharge our liabilities. The law of Moses provided (Lev. xxv. 39-41) that in case of inability to pay his debts, a man and his children might be sold and remain in bondage until the next year of jubilee. The laws we have outraged have handed us over to a bondage of the worst kind—the bondage of sin. "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey." The more sin is yielded to, the greater moral ruin it works, and the more tyrannical the slavery it entails.

II. That every provision has been made by Divine grace to restore humanity to a state of moral solvency. Great as is the havoc wrought by sin, the remedy is greater. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. v.). All the perfections of the Divine nature are engaged in the restoration of fallen humanity. The redemption by Christ Jesus is universally applicable. Restoration is possible to the most abandoned—the heaviest debt may be cancelled. Heaven itself is too narrow for the full display of the Divine goodness—its streams flow down to bless and replenish the neediest on earth.

III. That individual effort is demanded in order to participate in the ample supplies of Divine grace. The widow in her extremity seeks for help, and readily obeys the directions given. The vessels are collected and the oil is poured out (verses 1-5). So Divine grace, to be enjoyed, is to be sought, and the Divine commands humbly and believingly obeyed. "Ye have not, because ye ask not." It is not for man to question the Divine directions, but to obey; not to slight or ignore the Divine provisions, but eagerly and gratefully to accept them. The rarest treasures of earth are discovered by the diligent and persevering seeker. The blessings of heaven are worthy of the most laborious effort. Conscious need sharpens the vision and stimulates exertion.

IV. That the supply of Divine grace is limited only by the capacity of the receiver. Every available vessel was filled with the oil. When there were no more vessels to be obtained, the supply ceased (verse 6). The grace of God is practically inexhaustible; it is limited, not in itself, but by the capacity of the individual receiver. Copious as may be the rain-fall, a very limited quantity will suffice for the needs of a single flower. To a certain extent it may be true that the grace of God enlarges the vessel which it enriches with its blessings. The enjoyment of spiritual good increases the desire for more.

V. That the reception of Divine grace furnishes the loftiest motives to an upright and useful life. "Go, sell the oil and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest" (verse 7). One of the first and simplest principles of

true religion is honesty—it teaches a man to pay his debts. He is to do justly. Some time ago the clothes of a gentleman were found on the seashore where he was accustomed to bathe, but no trace of his body was discovered. After due delay the amount for which his life was insured was paid. He swam out to a passing ship, assuming to be a political offender of whom the police were in search, and was taken on board. Under a new name, in the United States, he prospered; and, what was more, he became a subject of renewing grace. In a short time after he remitted to the insurance office a sum of money—principal and interest—of which it had been robbed under such false pretences. It brings religion into disgrace to neglect to pay just debts when fully able to do so. "For the grace of God was manifested, bringing salvation to all men, disciplining us, in order that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, justly, and godly in the present world" (Titus ii. 11, 12).—*Alford.* Religion supplies the most powerful motives to live the highest life, and teaches us how to act in all our relationships and duties.

LESSONS:—1. *The grace of God is universally needed.* 2. *Is boundless in generosity.* 3. *Has wrought marvellous changes in the condition and prospects of humanity.*

THE WIDOW'S POT OF OIL.

VERY abrupt and striking were the transitions in the life of Elisha. Yesterday he wrought a stupendous miracle which supplied the wants of a whole army, and was the means, more than the sword of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat, of subduing the rebellious kingdom of Moab; to-day he works a miracle for the relief of a poor and friendless widow, to save her sons from slavery and herself from starvation. In this respect Elisha is a type of the faithful Christian minister, who has to pass through scenes as chequered and transitions in their own way as sudden and remarkable, who, abstracted from common interests and habits, and lifted by his unworldly character and mission above all human precedences, is debtor alike to the rich and the poor.

I. To this widow Elisha stood as the representative of the compassionate Saviour, before whom all the world's glory pales, and whose presence alone can, without disturbance to the order of society, equalise all human ranks and level all their conventional distinctions in the dust. She was in circumstances that made her feel with peculiar painfulness the gradations of ranks and the vicissitudes of life. If we are to believe the voice of tradition as expressed by Josephus, she was one who had seen better days, being the widow of Obadiah, the lord high-chamberlain of Ahab. While her husband lived she breathed the atmosphere of a court, and was nourished in the lap of luxury. But when he died, she seems to have been reduced to the utmost poverty. On account of these trying circumstances, her case was one that peculiarly warranted the interposition of heaven. But she had another claim still, beside that of her wretchedness, upon the sympathy and help of Elisha. Her husband feared the Lord while he lived. He was the son of a prophet, and cherished the deepest regard for the person and the work of those who filled that sacred office. If he was indeed Obadiah, the steward of Ahab—and there seems no reason to doubt the Jewish tradition—then the sacred story informs us that during the fierce persecution of the prophets of Israel by Jezebel he took an hundred of these prophets, and, at the peril of his life, hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water during the whole continuance of the famine. He may have spent upon the prophets of the Lord what he meant for his own wife and children. Like Joseph in Pharaoh's court, like Daniel in Babylon, the upright and pious chamberlain in the palace of Ahab did not take advantage of his opportunities of

enriching himself, as the officers of Eastern monarchs have so often done. On the contrary, he spent his fortune in benefiting the needy, and died poor. On this ground his widow might well appeal to Elisha for assistance.

II. Elisha willingly acknowledges the claim. He is filled with pity for the poor broken-hearted widow. Who knows what terrible privations she underwent without complaining while she had the company of her sons to cheer her? But when they were about to be taken from her, she could no more hide her suffering. She must get help, else she will die. Elisha's first question to her evinced a wonderful knowledge of the human heart, and of the best mode of dealing with poverty and suffering. Instead of volunteering to give her aid at once, as most persons would have done, carried away by an overpowering impulse of compassion at the recital of the tale of sorrow, like a wise and judicious friend he enquires how far she herself has the power to avert the threatened calamity—"What hast thou in the house?" His assistance must be based upon her own assistance. He will help her to help herself. And this is the only true way to benefit the poor. By reckless and indiscriminate almsgiving, by wholesale gifts of money, we run the risk of pauperising the objects of our charity. Our assistance, therefore, should be of such a nature as to call forth the resources which they themselves possess, and to make the most of them. No help from without can benefit, unless there be a willingness of self-help within. Of course such a mode as this of administering charity is more troublesome, and requires a greater expenditure of time and self-denial, than the plan of throwing a dole to a beggar to get rid of his importunity. But putting him in the way of helping himself will be truer charity than any gift of money.

III. The widow of Obadiah had nothing in the house save a pot of oil. Out of this last pot of oil—the sign of her utmost poverty—Elisha furnished the source of her comfort and happiness. Like Elijah, who made the handful of meal and the cruse of oil already existing an unwasting provision for each new day's want; like a greater than Elijah, whose miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes took its point of departure into the supernatural from the common barley loaves and fishes before Him; so Elisha, in the case of Obadiah's widow, made the produce of nature and of man's labour the basis of his wonderful act. In the fables of all nations we are told that a magician, by a mere wave of his wand, or by pronouncing a certain charm, produces at once wealth and luxuries that had no existence before. Aladdin rubs a ring, and immediately a genius appears, and at his command provides a rich feast for him out of nothing. He rubs an old lamp, and at once a gorgeous palace rises up before him in substantial reality created out of the formless ether around. By putting on Fortunatus's wishing cap, the lucky possessors of it can get anything they want, and create things unknown before. But there is nothing like this in the miracles of the Bible. The prophets and godly men of old were no such magicians as these. Their most wonderful works are in beautiful accordance with the wise laws of labour and economy which pervade the ordinary arrangements of life. Even the miracles of Christ, which approached nearest to creations out of nothing, rested upon a fulcrum of existing materials, by means of which their supernatural leverage was exerted. In miracles, man must be a fellow-worker with God in subduing the earth, and in removing the limitations and disabilities of the curse. In these actions men prepared themselves by the miracle wrought within them—the triumph over natural unbelief and the objections of reason—to believe in and to benefit by the miracle about to be wrought without. They heated the iron, as it were, which the hammer of Omnipotence was about to strike and to mould for His purposes.

IV. The widow of Obadiah might well be astonished at the command of

Elisha. But, in spite of all the objections of reason and common sense, she hastened to obey the prophet. Her faith triumphed over all difficulties. It is a significant circumstance that he should have commanded her to shut the door upon herself and her sons. Reverence, stillness, and solitude are needed for the miracle, and therefore the door must be shut, and the unsympathetic world must be excluded. It is not in the crowd that God works His wonders in nature and grace; it is in the lonely place, to the solitary individual. Who is it that sees the grander revelations of nature, but he who turns his back upon the human multitude, and seeks communion with her alone in the sanctuary of her hills and desert places? But, besides being necessary to prepare the widow of Obadiah for receiving the benefits of the miracle, the solitude and secrecy which Elisha enjoined were significant of the mysterious character of the miracle itself. It was veiled in the same obscurity as all creative acts—as all beginnings. The seed germinates—or, in other words, multiplies itself—in darkness; animal life begins in the mysterious secrecy of the womb; formless matter crystallizes in the sunless caves of the earth into more than the glory of living flowers. Who catches the exact moment when the evening star first twinkles in the transparent blue? Who has noticed the unfolding of the full-blown rose from the bud? God's arm wrought unseen for Israel in the bosom of the dark cloud which rested over the Red Sea all the night; and in the morning the dry path was revealed between the crystal walls of water. The veil of darkness concealed the falling of the manna from heaven; and the dawn only disclosed it as it whitened the tawny sand of the desert around the tents of Israel. Verily God hideth himself—shuts, as it were, the door upon all His origins and commencements, and leaves us baffled outside. Science and religion and all life bring us back to unfathomable mystery—a closed door, whose magic "sesame" no human being can utter.

V. How great must have been the astonishment of the widow when, pouring into the first vessel a quantity of oil from her pot, the vessel filled immediately after the first few drops; and the same thing happened as she passed from vessel to vessel, each filling to the brim as soon as she poured a little from her own store into it; until at the end, pouring the last remaining drops into the last vessel, her own stock of oil and the supply from heaven failed together. The process by which the oil was multiplied we labour in vain to conceive. We cannot explain the phenomenon by the observation of any known laws; and yet, in truth, the miracle is not more strange, save in the rapidity with which it is effected, than that which is every day going forward in nature in those regions where the olive tree grows. You sow the seed of an olive tree; that seed contains a very small quantity of oil. It grows and becomes a tree and produces an immense quantity of fruit; so that from the little drop of oil in the small vessel of the seed, you have thousands of vessels in the shape of the berries, each filled with oil. The miracle teaches us that the natural process is not the result of an impersonal law or of a dead course of things, but the working of our Father in heaven; while the natural process in its turn shows to us that God in the miracle is working in the line of the ordinary events and dispensations of His providence.

IV. Awestruck and filled with amazement, the widow went and told the Man of God what had happened. She asked for counsel in the strange and unexpected emergency. She needed assurance of the reality and permanence of this marvellous good fortune. The oil might vanish as mysteriously as it came. How calmly the prophet receives her! He knew what would happen. And does not this show a wonderful amount of faith and confidence in God on the part of Elisha? He told the widow to sell the miraculous oil and pay her debt with the price of it, and use what she could not sell as food for herself and her children. The miracle goes no further than is absolutely necessary. It

blends with common life. It does not permanently enrich the poor; it provides only for the temporary necessity. How strikingly does this incident show that we must be fellow-workers with God *throughout*, from first to last, in our own deliverance and blessing? Thus, in a most interesting manner, was the bread cast upon the waters found after many days. The widow proved in her experience the truth of the Saviour's words: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;" or, as the phrase should be translated literally, "Blessed are the olive givers, for olives shall be given to them." Obadiah had poured the oil of his bounty into the afflicted heart of God's servants; and God's servant in return gave his widow the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

VII. We might make many practical uses of the widow's pot of oil, for it is full of significance, but we prefer turning the incident into a parable, and using it as an encouragement to prayer. We are all in the condition of the poor widow; we are destitute of everything, and are ready to perish. But God is far more tender and considerate to us than Elisha was to the widow. If we have but the feeling of want, but the desire for God's help, that very want or desire will be to us what the pot of oil was to the widow—the source of an abundant supply of all we need. If we come to God with the longing of our hearts for His salvation, He will come with the fulness of His Godhead, and supply all our needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus. If we provide vessels, God will furnish the oil with which to fill them. For our own little oil He will give us overflowing measure; for our feeble desire, He will do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. Let us, borrow, then, many vessels; let them be empty, nothing of self in them, and let us lay them before Christ, and He will fill them to the brim with the oil of His grace. Gethsemane, the place where He suffered the last agony, means a press for olive oil. From that oil-press of sorrow He will provide a sufficient supply of the oil of gladness for us.—Condensed from the *Sunday Magazine* for 1873).

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-7. The widow's cruse. I. *The widow's difficulty.* (1). The nature of it. A debt. One that she could not pay. Might not be much, but she was poor. (2). Had come upon her suddenly. Otherwise her husband would not have left her thus. Some provision would have been made. (3). Aggravations of the difficulty. Her sons, instead of being her stay and support in her widowhood, must now work for another. Instead of being prophets, they must be bondsmen. It does not necessarily follow that her creditor was hard-hearted. He may have been; he seems only to have wanted his own. He may have been poor. On the other hand, he may have rejoiced at breaking up such a home. II. *The widow's helper.* God. (1). Agreeable to His nature, knows what we have need of. A just God. Would equally defend the right of the creditor, as well as the case of the widow. (2). In harmony with His Word. Widows and orphans are His special care. (3). In aiding her He employs the prophet. It may be that her husband's connection with the prophets had brought her into this strait. If so, there was a fitness in the selection of her instrument of deliverance. Man the helper of man. Man blessed that he may become a blessing. (4). He aided in answer to prayer. She sought and found. She came first to Elisha. Trial of faith and reward of it. III. *The widow's deliverance.* (1). Speedily effected. Not long years of hard service of her sons and herself. This prompt help shows the prophet's sympathy and

sense of justice too. (2). Strange method. Vessels borrowed. Great many. All her neighbours'. (3). The command. Close doors. No prying eyes of people who might misunderstand the whole case. "Pour out." She does so, and her cruse fills all the vessels. Sells the oil and pays the debt. (4). The effect. Her character for honesty vindicated. Her sons saved to her and to their high vocation. She is saved from the need of hard and unaccustomed toil. The Divine friend of the helpless and poor is, by this history, commended to all widows. The story is one of many encouraging events that may lead widows, and such as are friendless, to trust in God. Many sad hearts, empty of comfort, have been filled with the oil of joy out of her cruse.

LEARN:—1. *The best people are sometimes exposed to trial.* 2. *God is a present help in the time of need.* 3. *We should sympathize with the sad as Elisha with the widow.* 4. *Our little may go far, with God's blessing.—The Class and Desk.*

Verse 1. The griping tyranny of debt. I. May fasten upon those who do their best to avoid it. II. Is the more keenly felt in proportion to the desire to do everything in the fear of the Lord. III. Brings suffering and slavery upon the family.

— How thick did the miseries of this poor afflicted woman light upon her! Her husband is lost, her estate clogged with debts, her children ready to be taken for slaves. Her husband was a religious and worthy man; he paid his debts to nature, he could not to his creditors. They are cruel, and rake in the scarce closed wound of her sorrow, passing an arrest worse than death upon her sons. Virtue and goodness can pay no debts. The holiest man may be deep in arrearages and break the bank, not through lavishness and riot of expense, but through either iniquity of times, or evil casualties. Ahab and Jezebel were lately on the throne; who can marvel that a prophet was in debt! It was well that any good man might have his breath free, though his estate were not. Wilfully to overlash our ability cannot stand with wisdom and good government; but no providence can guard us from crosses. Holiness is no more defence against debt than against death. Grace can keep us from unthriftiness, not from want.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 3-5. In temporal affairs experience must precede and faith follow; in spiritual affairs faith must precede, and then experience follows, for we do not find out the truth unless belief in God's Word has preceded (Jno. vii. 17). Whatever a man does in the obedience of faith, whether it appears foolish or vain in the eyes of the world, is nevertheless blessed by God, and redounds to his soul's health.—*Cramer.*

Verse 5. It was time to shut the door, saith a reverend man, when many greater vessels must be supplied from one little one. But why must the door be shut? 1. That she might be the more free to pray (Matt. vi. 6). 2. That she might manifest her own faith, and not be hindered by the unbelief of others (Mark vi. 5, 6). 3. That it might not be thought that the oil was by anybody secretly conveyed into the house to them.

— The secrecy of the Divine workings. I. Strengthens the convictions of their supernatural character. II. Demands a more implicit faith. III. Does not prevent their beneficent results being apparent to all.

Verse 6. Out of one small jar was poured out so much oil as by a miraculous multiplication filled all these empty casks. Scarce had that pot any bottom, at least the bottom that it had was to be measured by the brims of all those vessels: this was so deep as they were high; could they have held more this pot had not been empty. Even so the bounty of our God gives grace and glory according to the capacity of the receiver. When he ceases to infuse, it is for want of room in the heart to take it in. Could we hold more, O God, thou wouldst give more: if there be

any defect, it is in our vessels, not in thy beneficence!—*Bp. Hall.*

— This is a good emblem of the grace of God. While there is an empty, longing heart, there is a continual overflowing fountain of salvation. If we find in any place, or at any time, that the oil ceases to flow, it is because there are no empty vessels there, no souls hungering and thirsting for righteousness.—*Clarke.*

Verse 7. If means are given thee to satisfy thy creditor, let it be thy first duty to pay him before thou carest for thyself! He who can pay his debts but will not, takes what does not belong to him, and sins against the eighth commandment. When the Lord gives there is always something left over and above. He never merely takes away distress, He gives a blessing besides. He desires, however, that the obligation to our neighbour should first be satisfied before we begin to enjoy His blessing.—*Lange.*

— Some of the ancient interpreters find in this widow an image of the Gentile church. The husband being dead signifies that she was no longer joined to her ancient idolatries. Her coming to Elisha and obeying his word is explained as a type of the eagerness with which the Gentiles sought salvation at the hands of Christ and His apostles; and the abundant supply of oil represents the bountiful provisions of the Gospel to deliver all nations from the bondage of sin.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 8-17.

Genuine Kindness is Never Unrewarded.

I. It is in the power of all classes to show kindness (verse 8). Elisha was hospitably entertained by a "great woman"—great in moral goodness as well as in wealth. It is in the power of the rich to do much good with their riches. All honour to those who of their abundance take pleasure in ministering to the wants of the needy. It is in their power greatly to augment the happiness of the world. But alas! how many there are who, with ample means to do good to others, have not the disposition. The lack of the disposition is more sad, and, unfortunately, more common, than the lack of the ability. It is not, however, the exclusive privilege of the rich to show kindness to others. The poor may, and do, help the poor. There are many who, like the poor widow of Zarephath, are ready to share their last crust and their last cruse of oil. There are arts of kindness more precious than money. These it is in the power of all classes to show—rich or poor, great or insignificant. A generous spirit is governed more by the actual necessity of the case than by the expense. Great acts of kindness are not accomplished without cost (1 Chron. xxi. 24).

II. It is a special privilege to show kindness to a true servant of God (verses 9, 10). There was something about the mien and spirit of Elisha which impressed the women of Shunem that he was "an holy man of God." He was so different from the prophets of Baal, or from many who pretended to a character of sanctity to which they had no claim. In a time of such widespread degeneracy, a good man was too rare not to be easily distinguished. In showing kindness to Elisha, she paid deference to the God whom he worshipped and whose truth he taught. The love of kindness should spring from the love of goodness. "Those that are truly pious and devout think their houses and their hands cannot be too open to the messengers of God, and are most glad to exchange their earthly commodities for the others spiritual. Superfluity should not fall within the care of a prophet, necessity must. He that could provide oil for the widow, could have provided all needful helps for himself. What

room had there been for the charity and beneficence of others, if the prophet should have always maintained himself out of power?" A judicious use of kindness to the truly good is more fruitful of blessing than the most lavish generosity towards the undeserving. Indiscriminate charity does more to pauperise than to really help.

III. A grateful heart knows how to appreciate genuine kindness (verse 11. 13). The prophet was not unmindful of the thoughtfulness and liberality with which he was treated, and was anxious to bestow some substantial proof of his appreciation and gratitude. Kindness begets kindness. It is the curse of a selfish and covetous spirit to receive all and give nothing in return. The heart that cannot respond to repeated acts of kindness is past all feeling—it is petrified into stony hopelessness. Gratitude will manifest itself; it is restless to show its appreciation of kindness. "An ingenuous dispositiou cannot receive favours without thoughts of return. A wise debtor is desirous to retribute in such kind as may be most acceptable to his obligers. Without this discretion, we may offer such requitals as may seem goodly to us—to our friends, worthless."

IV. The reward of genuine kindness often comes in a form least expected (verses 14-17). The kind hostess of the prophet did not look for any recompense. She had no difficulty in which Elisha's influence with the king or the captain of the host would be of any service to her. She was not conscious of needing anything. The recompense came in a way wholly unexpected—all human probabilites seemed against her being thus honoured—she received the promise of a son. To an Israelitish wife childlessness was a reproach and disgrace (Gen. xxx. 23; Luke i. 25). In some way unexpected, but in a way that will bring much satisfaction and joy, kindness will meet with its reward. There is a special blessing connected with what we do for the servants of God (Matt. x. 40-42).

LESSONS:—1. *The love of moral goodness begets a true generosity.* 2. *A generous spirit never lacks opportunity for its exercise.* 3. *Kindness shown to the servants of God is never lost.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. There are always, among those whose lot it is to have wealth, some who do not attach their hearts to it, and do not trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God; who have not become satiated and indifferent in their hearts, but hunger and thirst after righteousness, and have an earnest desire for the bread of life. The servants of the Word ought not to withdraw themselves from these, but advance to meet them in every way. God always gives to His children pious hearts, so that they open their houses and shelter strangers. Though the Gadarenes beg him to depart (Luke viii. 37), though there are Samaritans who will not receive Christ (Luke ix. 52), yet there is always a good soul which is glad to take the Lord Jesus and receive Him to itself. He who, like the Shunammite, honours and loves the Lord, and is anxious to lead a life in God, honours and loves also the servants of the Lord, and seeks their society. He does not seek them, however, as pleasant companions, or merely in order to claim their help in bodily need, but he seeks them as shepherds, as soul-physicians, as guardians of God's mysteries, and as messengers in Christ's stead.—*Lange.*

Verses 9-11. **A true servant of God.** I. Distinguished by purity of life and character. "A holy man is like a crystal glass with a clear lamp in the midst of it." II. Exerts a

beneficial influence on all with whom he comes in contact. III. Inspires generous purposes in the hearts of all lovers of goodness. IV. Sincerely appreciates acts of kindness done for his own or his Master's sake.

Verses 12-17. **The conversation of Elisha with the Shunammite.** 1. *The question of Elisha.* A question inspired by gratitude, although the woman had far more reason to thank him than he her. A noble heart does not like to receive a favour and make no return, but recognizes its obligation to return it. It is also a test-question, to see if the Shunammite had received him in the name of a prophet, and not for the sake of a reward, or for any temporal gain. The question as to thy wishes is a question as to the disposition of thy heart. 2. *The answer of the Shunammite.* She seeks no recompense for the good she has done; she wishes to have nothing to do with the court of the king, and of the great ones of this world; she has no desire for high things—a sign of great humility and modesty. Although she lacked that which was essential to the honour and happiness of an Israelitish wife—a son—yet she was contented, and no word of complaint passed her lips—a sign of great contentment. The Lord, according to His grace and truth, remembers even the wishes that we cherish in silence and do not express before men, and He often gives to those who yield to His holy will without murmurs or complaints just that which they no longer dared to hope for. It makes a great difference whether we doubt of the Divine promises from unbelief, or from humility, or want of confidence in ourselves, because we consider the promises too great and glorious, and ourselves unworthy of them.—*Lange.*

Verse 13. It is good hearing that an Elisha is in such grace at the court that he can promise himself access to the king in a friend's suit. It was not ever thus. The time was when his master heard, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Now the late miracle which Elisha wrought in gratifying the three kings with water and victory hath endeared him to the king of Israel. Bad as Jehoram was, yet he honoured the man of God. Not to his own advancement doth Elisha desire to improve the king's favour, but to the behoof, to the relief of others. There cannot be a better office, nor more beseeming a prophet, than to speak in the cause of the dumb, to befriend the oppressed, to win greatness unto the protection of innocence. —*Bp. Hall.*

— "I dwell among mine own people." A spirit of contentment. I. Finds its happiness in its immediate surroundings. II. Is not allured by offers of greater worldly distinction. III. Is not involved in troubles requiring the interference of the great and powerful. IV. Does not show kindness to others with the design of securing any advantage, or receiving anything in return.

— The good matron needs no shelter of the great. "I dwell among mine own people." As if she said: The courtesy is not small in itself, but not useful to me. I live here quietly, in a contented obscurity, out of the reach either of the glories or cares of a court; free from wrongs, and free from envies. Not so high as to provoke an evil eye, not so low as to be trodden on. I have neither fears nor ambitions. My neighbours are my friends, my friends are my protectors; and, if I should be so unhappy as to be the subject of main injuries, would not stick to be mine advocates. This favour is for those that either affect greatness, or groan under oppression. I do neither, for "I live among my own people." O Shunammite! thou shalt not escape envy. Who can hear of thy happy condition, and not say, why am I not thus? If the world afford any perfect contentment, it is in a middle estate, equally distant from penury, from excess. It is in a calm freedom, a secure tranquillity, a sweet fruition of ourselves, of ours.

Verse 16. How liberal is God by His prophet in giving beyond her

requests. Not seldom doth His bounty overreach our thoughts, and meet us with those benefits which we thought too good for us to ask. We are never sure of what we desire. We are not more hard to believe than loath to distrust beneficial events. She well knew the prophet's holiness could not stand with wilful falsehood. Perhaps she might think it spoken by way of trial, not of serious affirmation —*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 18-37.

A Great Trial and its Joyous Issue.

Sorrow and joy, tears and laughter, lie close together in the ever-changing experience of human life. The source of greatest joy is often turned into a channel through which flows the bitterest anguish. The son of the Shunamite, whose advent brought gladness into the home, was also the means of bringing over it the darkest shadow of trouble. But as the star shines brightest in the night, so in the gloomiest moments of our distress are we most conscious of the radiance of the Divine presence, and are more impressed with the wisdom and glory of His works.

I. Here we have the trial of a first bereavement (verses 18-21). 1. *It was the bereavement of an only son.* It was not only the loss of a child, but of the *only* child, and that child the son and heir—a child sent as a special and unlooked-for gift of heaven, as of one "born out of due time." The first and fondest affections of the parental heart had centred in this child, and his loss was the heaviest affliction his parent had ever known. Words cannot depict the keen and bitter pang of a first bereavement—the heart lies pierced and bleeding, writhing in voiceless and helpless agony. Happy is the sufferer who can find relief in tears! 2. *The bereavement was sudden.* One moment the lad is blithe and merry in his gambols in the harvest field—the pride of his father, who already sees in the abundance of his fields the means of blessing the future of his son; the next moment he is smitten by the fierce rays of the sun that had ripened his father's wealth, and he is carried to his mother's lap to die. The eyes that had watched with a mother's rapture the nimble form of her darling boy as he bounded towards the fields in the golden light of that harvest morning, with his parting kiss fresh upon her lips, are now bent in tearless grief over his corpse. A few brief hours have brought the change from light to darkness, from life to death. Ah! how sudden are the great changes of life—how swift is the messenger of sorrow! We live a life-time in a moment, and the heart receives a scar that time will never efface.

II. Here we have a trial of faith in the Almighty power of God (verses 22-30). 1. *Sorrow should not destroy, but intensify, our faith.* As soon as the first shock of alarm had subsided, the faith of the Shunamite woman in the God of Elisha asserted its power. She believed her boy might be restored. So strong was this belief that, for the time being, she hid the fact of his death from her husband. She heroically bore the grief herself, strong in the confidence of Divine interference. The soul that has no faith in God is paralyzed and helpless in sorrow. The distress that drives the believer to God, drives the unbeliever to despair. "Faith is the best lever at a dead lift." 2. *Faith prompts to the use of all legitimate means to attain our most ardent desires.* With all speed she sought an interview with the prophet, poured her grief into his ears, and passionately entreated his help; nor would she cease her supplications until she prevailed upon him to accompany her to the home where the dead child lay The chamber of the prophet was, for the first time, the chamber of death.

Faith without works is dead. It is presumption to expect God to do what we can do for ourselves. Only when we have exhausted all human means may we patiently and believingly wait for the Divine interference. We cannot save ourselves; but we are directed to ask, seek, knock.

III. Here we have the trial of a painful suspense (verses 32-35). Elisha entered the chamber, shut the door, and was alone with the dead child and with God. Who can describe the agony of suspense that tortured that mother's heart during the few hours of the prophet's absence—how hope and fear alternated? Will the door never open again? Will the prayers of the holy man prevail? Will she clasp again her living son? And yet most of us are acquainted with such moments in life. How much has sometimes depended upon a single hour—upon a letter—upon a telegram! Such moments have been experienced at the rescue of a wrecked crew. Will the vessel hold together—will the line bear the strain—till the last man is saved?

IV. Here we have the sorrow of death exchanged for the joy of a miraculous resurrection (verses 36, 37). The faith and prayer of the prophet triumph. The child is restored to life, and given back to his mother. Who can describe her rapture? "This my son was dead, and is alive again." A symbol of the rapid and marvellous changes in life. After a storm, a calm. Trial, conflict, despair, give place to joyous deliverance. "Sorrow may endure for a night; but joy cometh in the morning."

LESSONS:—1. *There is no home into which death does not sooner or later enter.* 2. *The only refuge and relief in sorrow is in God.* 3. *The greatest trials lead to the realization of the greatest blessings.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 18-37. The Shunammite's son. I. *A proud mother's delight.* (1). Her son. The pleasure she took in watching his childhood and growth, &c. He was her treasure. (2). He was her only son. This would increase her anxiety and also her delight in him Judg. xi. 34; Luke ix. 38). (3). The child of promise (verse 16, 17). Hebrew wives anxious to have children—especially to have a son. This desire is natural, not confined to Hebrews. Her husband was well off, and here was a son to inherit the father's property and name. (4). Harvest time. Her child sent out to play in the harvest field. She watches him depart, and thinks of the happy day he would have, and the meeting at night. II. *A tender mother's trial.* (1). The child in the field. Youthful sports. Playing at harvesting. The father's pleasure. The sunstroke. "My head! my head!" The father's sorrow. "Carry him to his mother." A mother the best nurse. (2). She sees her child returning, not running by the father's side, but carried. Her anxiety. Her fears. (3). Nurses her child. The time drags on. The mother does not tire. The child dies. She has faith left. Faith a good companion in trouble. This child of promise could not be lost—should not die if she could help it. Carries the child into the prophet's chamber. III. A good wife's example. (1). Considers not her own feelings only, but her husband's also. How great his grief on his return, and finding death in his house! (2). Resolves on immediate action. Will visit the man of God. Cannot do this without assistance. The distance is very great. Calculates the time can accomplish it before the day is over. (3). Hastens to the field—begs for one of the young men, &c. Does not tell her husband. Would not grieve him. A hint for those who unnecessarily burden other

people with their troubles. IV. *A happy mother's reward.* (1). She returns with the prophet. Who would bring a doctor to a dead child? Her faith. (2). The child's wonderful restoration to life. (3). The first reward. Clasping the living child to her heart. (4). Second reward. The father's return and greeting. Pleased to find that the child is well. Astonishment at learning the history of the day. Men at their occupations little think of the trials at home. Should commend their dear ones to God. (5). Her after rewards. The preservation and growth of this child.

LEARN:—1. *To repay a mother's love and anxious care.* 2. *Try to bear your trial nobly without making other people bear it.* 3. *Jesus will raise all children up at the Last Day.—Class and Desk.*

Verses 18, 19. His father grew young again with the pleasure of this sight, and more joyed in this spring of his hopes than in all the crops of his harvest. But what stability is there in earthly delights? The hot beams of the sun beat upon that head which much care had made tender and delicate. The child complains to his father of his pain. Oh, that grace would teach us, what nature teaches infants, in all our troubles to bemoan ourselves to our Heavenly Father!

Verse 18. **A day in a mother's life.** There are times when everything goes on smoothly, and one day is like another. Again there are times when changes come, and whole years of joy or sorrow may be concentrated into a single day. So it was with the household at Shunem. It was a hallowed day when Elisha first entered the house (verse 8). It was a joyous day when a man-child was born (verse 17). But most memorable of all was that day when the only son was lost and found; was dead, and received back to life again (verses 18-37). 1. *Morning joys.* It is the harvest time. "Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening" (Psalm civ. 22, 23). First, we see mother and child *at home.* She is called "a great woman" (verse 8). This implies not greatness in wealth, but in character (Prov. xii. 26; xxxi. 10-31). Doubtless she would show her "greatness" not only in her management of household affairs, but in her care of her child. How tenderly she would watch over him; with what gentle wisdom she would train him in the ways in which he should go! Day by day he grew before her in strength and comeliness. He was her joy and pride. His birth had taken away her reproach; his training had developed all the deepest feelings of her nature; his fellowship was her delight, and his future the dearest hope of her life. He should live and prosper. He would yet do worthily in Shunem, and be famous in Jezreel. Oh, happy mothers,

> "Who carry music in their heart;
> Plying the daily task with busier feet
> Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat."

The next scene is in *the harvest field.* Here, too, all is joy. The father is glad at sight of his boy. His coming is not the result of command, but of his own choice. There is such love between him and his father as makes their meeting and intercourse a joy to both. They are happy together. See them watching the reapers, or walking hand in hand amidst the yellow corn. The father's heart swells with gladness. His boy is more to him than all his fields. He is his only son, his heir, his treasure, the hope of his old age. He sees in him his mother's love and image, and the stay of her heart when he himself is gone. How fervently he prays: "The God of Jacob bless the lad." 2. *Darkness at noon.* How soon may the brightest sky be clouded. How quickly may the happiest home be darkened by sorrow and the shadow of death! "We know not what a day may bring forth." The sun is high and hot in the heavens. Suddenly a cry of agony is heard—"My head, my head!" It is the cry of a *child.* How strange the association—childhood and pain! Surely here is a proof of the ravages of sin (Rom. v.

14). We may hear many sermons, and give no heed; but hard and callous is the heart that can behold the sufferings of a child and yet not feel humbled and awed before God. It is *a cry raised in the midst of innocent labour* The work going on is good, and not evil. It is in accordance with God's ordinance. It is wholesome and pure. Old and young may join in it freely. Such, at least, it was in the olden time, when the simplicity of and purity of pastoral life was still known in the land (Ruth ii. 4). And yet here death comes. There is no place safe. There is no people or work with immunity from trouble. *The cry brought woe to the father's heart.* His son's voice was sweet to his ear. Many a time had he heard it and been glad. But now the words "my head" are like a sword. Well did he know the import of that terrible cry. He is helpless. But he knows where comfort is to be found. "To his mother." It was the instinct of his heart. It was what the boy himself would have said, could he have spoken. Where is there a comforter like a mother? It may be the child is hurt. Others may make light of it: not so his mother. It may be he is *weary of learning.* Others may be hard and impatient: not so his mother. It may be he has *committed a fault.* Others may be severe and unsympathizing: not so his mother. It may be he has been *stricken by sickness.* Others may not understand or take heed: not so his mother. Work is laid aside. Comforts are got. Books, pictures are bought. Everything must give way to the little invalid. "His mother." Sure refuge for the weary; true resting-place for the sick and stricken child. *Picture the sad home-coming.* "Carry him." The lad obeys. What a change! He came out full of life and frolic; he is borne back helpless as a clod. "His mother." Perhaps on household business intent. Perhaps preparing for the return of father and child, and busy in heart shaping joyous things. Alas! how dreadful the awakening (verse 20). Mark her gentleness. "*On her knees*"—where often she had dandled him with delight. Her *patience and hope. Till noon.* What suspense! What hoping against hope! Her *terrible distress.* "*Died.*" Seemed like as if the sun had gone down at noon. All was dark. In that moment what thoughts crowded upon her soul! What a trial to her faith! God seemed to have forsaken her. Thus with many—

"Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break."

III. Light at evening time. All is not lost, since God liveth. This woman, like her countryman of Gospel times, was great in faith. Therefore, instead of giving way to despair, she strengthens her heart in God. Perhaps she said to herself, like David, "Why art thou cast down, my soul? Still hope in God." Mark *the preparation.* What promptitude and decision! The *long ride to Carmel.* At other times might have admired the "glory of Carmel," but now she is preoccupied—her heart is fixed. She is silent. The *passionate appeal to the prophet* (verses 27-30). Nothing will satisfy her but Elisha. He is to her the man of God. He stands as the prophet of the Lord to her, in sorrow as in joy. She will not leave off till he yields. Such importunity pleads not in vain. *The return and restoration* (verses 32-37). Hope has sprung up again in her breast. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. How strange and solemn the scenes in the chamber of death! How wonderful the revival! God is great. Oh, what joy when the mother clasps again to her breast her beloved boy! Nothing Diviner could she feel short of heaven. Think of the happy close of the day in that Hebrew home! Dearer than ever was the son that had been dead, and received back to life again. Stronger than ever was the faith of father and mother in the God of Jacob, who had proved their Refuge and Help in the time of trouble. With what quiet and assured peace would they kneel in prayer. With what joyful hearts would they sing praises to the God of

Israel (Psalm xxx. 11, 12). What lessons to young and old are here (Ecc. xii. 1; Prov. xxii. 6; Eph. vi. 4). Trials will come. In the darkest hour God can help. Here the child cries to his father, the father sends to the mother, the mother appeals to the prophet, and the prophet casts himself on God. So let us cast ourselves on Christ, our God and Saviour (Isaiah lxvi. 13; John xi. 25).—*The Study and Pulpit.*

Verse 19. What an undivine inference was that of the Bishop of Hereford, in his sermon at Oxford upon this text, in the reign of Edward II., pursued at that time by his queen and son, that an aching and sick head of a kingdom was of necessity to be taken off, and no otherwise cured!—*Trapp.*

Verse 20. The death of a child. I. Lightly regarded by some. II. Is the first real sorrow to many. III. A proof of the prevalence and power of sin. IV. Gives a deeper interest to the bereaved in the better land.

— The death of loved children comes often suddenly, like the lightning from a clear sky, and destroys our joy and our hopes. Therefore, we should possess these gifts as not possessing them. The Lord will not abandon, in days of adversity, him who trusts in Him in days of prosperity. He who in the latter has learned sobriety, and maintained his faith, will not be without wisdom and consolation in the former, but will be composed in all adversity.—*Lange.*

Verses 22, 23. A prudent wife. I. Will control her own feelings for the sake of her husband. II. Will consult her husband on every needful occasion. III. Enjoys the respect and confidence of her husband in all things.

— A pious woman does nothing without her husband's knowledge, and does not willingly call his attention to anything by which he may be saddened.—*Starke.*

Verses 26, 27. This scene is natural and very graphic. If you ask after a person whom you know to be sick, the reply at first will invariably be *Well, thank God,* even when the very next sentence is to inform you that he is dying. Then the falling down, clasping the feet, &c., are actions witnessed every day. I have had this done to me often before I could prevent it. So also the officious zeal of the wicked Gehazi, who would thrust the broken-hearted mother away, probably thinking her touch pollution, agrees perfectly with wha we know of the man, and of the customs of the East.—*Thomson.*

Verse 26. "It is well." The verdict of hope. I. May be uttered when the heart is full of sorrow. II. Indicates an unwavering faith in God. III. May be true in a higher sense when present circumstances do not warrant the verdict.

— The highest Christian optimism. I. Teaches that all is well in its relation to the wisdom and love of God. II. In its present moral bearing on ourselves. III. In its relation to the compensation and glory of the future.

Verse 27. Do not make known at once to every one you meet that which distresses you, but keep it to yourself until you find one who understands you, and whose heart you have tested. Beware lest thou treat harshly sad souls who are overcome by grief, and who seek help and consolation, and lest thou thrust them away or judge them hastily. Do not cause still more grief to a bruised heart.

Verse 31. The powerlessness of some religious acts explained. I. Not because they are not done as commanded and with all due propriety and solemnity. II. But because there is a lack of earnest, acting, living faith. III. Because there are defects and inconsistencies of religious character.

— Why was Gehazi's mission with the staff a failure? First of all, we maintain that it is far from certain or evident that Elisha expected his staff and his servant would be effectual in raising the dead. On the contrary, it is very possible that he meant Gehazi's mission should be a failure, in order to show that the miracle could not be

wrought by any supposed magic of the staff, by any mere human agency whatever. But on the other supposition, certainly admissible, and even probable, that the prophet expected his staff to resuscitate the child, the failure is thus well explained by Kitto: "Elisha did not at first mean to go himself to Shunem, and for that reason sent his staff to supply the lack of his own presence. But after he had sent away the servant, his observation of the uneasiness of the mother, whom he had expected to have gone home satisfied, and her avowed determination not to leave him, induced him to alter his purpose, and, with the kindness natural to him, to forego his own engagements at Carmel, and to accompany her to her forlorn home. It was probably in consequence of this change of plan that no response was made to the first claim of faith by means of the staff. That appeal, in fact, was superseded the moment he resolved to go in person, the Lord thus reserving for the personal intercession of His prophet the honour of this marvellous deed." But Gehazi's supposed unfitness to work the miracle, and the woman's lack of faith in him, are facts not to be overlooked. They may be a sufficient reason for the failure of Gehazi's mission. For in the realm of the miraculous, Divine Power works not blindly nor arbitrarily, but according to sacred laws. To affirm that there must be a sympathetic union or spontaneous affiliation between the human agencies employed and those deeply concerned in a given miracle, is only to say what is abundantly suggested in the Scriptures. Nor is this to degrade a class of miracles to the low plane of animal magnetism, or explain them away on naturalistic principles; yet it need not be denied that the psychological basis of animal magnetism was a medium through which many miracles were performed, and without which some miracles could not have been wrought. When the disciples, after their failure to heal a lunatic child, asked Jesus why they could not work the miracle, He replied, "Because of your unbelief" (Matt. xvii. 20, comp. xiii. 58; Mark vi. 56; ix. 23).—*Whedon.*

— The staff of the prophet is of no use if the spirit and power of the prophet are wanting. Do not mistake the sign for the thing signified. It is God alone who can help, and His help is not dependent on external instruments and signs.

Verses 32-35. The power of prayer. 1. The best preparation for a great spiritual conflict. 2. Inspires an invincible faith. 3. Suggests the use of the best means for obtaining an answer. 4. Achieves great victories.

Verses 32, 33.—Merit and importunity have drawn Elisha from Carmel to Shunem. He finds his lodging taken up by that pale corpse. He shuts the door and falls to prayer. This staff of his, whatever became of the other, was long enough, he knew, to reach up to heaven, to knock at these gates, yea, to wrench them open. *Bishop Hall.*

Verse 34. He knew what Elijah had done in a similar case (1 Kings xvii. 21), and followed his example; but doubtless both Elijah and Elisha used these natural means in accordance with some special revelation that was given them. This placing of his mouth, eyes, and hands, upon those of the child, bore the same relation to this miracle which the spittle and the washing in Siloam did to the miracle by which Jesus gave sight to the man blind from his birth (John ix. 1-7). Divine power could have raised this child to life in answer to Elisha's prayer without any other action on the part of the prophet, but Divine wisdom decreed otherwise. Christ opened one blind man's eyes by a single command; but in the other case He adopted peculiar measures to work substantially the same miracle. We cannot tell why, but we accept the facts, and argue from them the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Rom. xi. 33). We do not presume to deny that our God might have adopted a different plan of redemption from the one we have, but we may well question the possi-

bility of a wiser one, and though we cannot fathom all its mystery, we accept with joy the fact of "God manifest in the flesh;" and in the blessed incarnation of our Lord, to use the analogy of this miracle of Elisha, we see with wonder how the God-man stretches himself upon our cold, lifeless humanity that was dead in trespasses and sins, and even contracts himself to the narrow span of our infancy, childhood, manhood. His blessed mouth and eyes and hands come into contact with our own. He breathes upon us the Holy Ghost, and we are quickened and warmed into a new and eternal life. We are thus raised from spiritual death, and our ears hear, and our eyes see, and our hands handle the word of life.—*Whedon.*

Verse 35. Thus the work is done by degrees and with difficulty, mystically showing how hard it is to raise one dead in sins and trespasses, and to bring the work to any good effect. To comfort a wounded conscience is as great work, saith Luther, as to raise one from the dead.—*Trapp.*

Verses 36, 37.—The mother is called in to receive a new life in her twice-given son. She comes in full of joy, full of wonder, bows herself to the ground, and falls down before those feet she had so boldly laid hold of in Carmel. Oh, strong faith of the Shunammite, that could not be discouraged with the seizure and continuance of death, raising up her heart still in an expectation of that life which to the eyes of nature had been impossible, irrevocable! Oh, infinite goodness of the Almighty, that would not suffer such faith to be frustrated, that would rather reverse the laws of nature, in returning a guest from heaven, and raising a corpse from death, than the confidence of a believing heart should be disappointed!—*Bishop Hall.*

As might be expected, there have not been wanting rationalistic interpreters who have explained this miracle as a case of suspended animation, or fit of apoplexy, and Elisha's efforts as the manipulations of animal magnetism, by which sensation was restored. Of course such expositors ignore or deny the plain statement that the child was dead, and so do not explain, but contradict and torture the word of Scripture.—*Whedon.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 38-41.

The Poison of Sin and its Cure.

This miracle of the healing of the poisonous pottage is a counterpart of that of the healing of the waters of Jericho (ii. 19-22). There the power of Elisha's God works on the water; here on the food of the prophets. The chief value of both miracles lies in the rich typical lessons they suggest concerning the coming in of Divine grace and power into the domain of man's most common life and wants, to leaven and heal with gracious influences all the disturbances and bitternesses of earthly experience. The incident related in this paragraph is illustrative of *the poison of sin and its cure.* Observe—

I. That humanity is infected with the poison of sin. It penetrates all classes, and mingles with the ever-changing circumstances of human life. It is so subtle in its workings, and so deceptive in its appearance, as to escape detection till its effects are felt, as was the case with the wild gourds innocently gathered by a son of the prophets (verse 39). It weakens everything it taints. It is a foe to all stability. It is said that when Nicephorus Phocas had built a strong wall about his palace for his own security, in the night time he heard a voice crying to him, "O Emperor! though thou build thy wall as high as the clouds, yet if sin be within, it will overthrow all." It is the custom of hunters in Africa, when they have killed a poisonous snake, to cut off its head, and carefully bury it in the ground, well knowing that if a naked foot trod on one

of these fangs it would be fatally wounded; the venom is as deadly after the snake is dead. But sin is a venomous snake which no human hunter can slay; it insinuates itself everywhere, and everywhere spreads its deadly virus.

II. That the poison of sin is fatal in its effects. "There is death in the pot" (verse 40). Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death (James i. 15). The almond tree blossoms before the foliage appears. The splendour of its ruby flowers lures the winged insects of the air, but as they sip its poisoned chalices they fall dead in myriads at its root. So sin is like that tree, attracting human souls to drink in pleasure from its luscious flowers until they fall, deluded, intoxicated, dead. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans v. 12).

III. That the poison of sin is neutralized by the gracious provisions of the Gospel (verse 41). There was no virtue in the meal itself to dissipate the poison of the pottage; it was but the *means* by which the miraculous power wrought the cure. So in the restoration to moral health of sin-poisoned humanity, while means are used, and must be used, the healing, saving power is Divine. The gospel, divinely devised, divinely developed, and divinely applied, is the unfailing panacea for the world's evil.

LESSONS:—1. *Sin is the great source of all human misery.* 2. *The remedy for human misery is Divinely provided* 3. *God is not indifferent to the common daily wants of human life.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 38. **The pursuit of truth.** I. *Is carried on by earnest souls in the midst of national distress.* "There was a dearth in the land." II. *Brings men into the presence of the great and good.* "The sons of the prophets were sitting before him." III. *Contented with a modest supply of physical needs.* "Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets."

— The prophets were poor, and glad of pottage. The saints are kept at hard commons, but have their keeping of free cost. The wicked have larger cakes, but pay sweetly.—*Trapp.*

— The sons of the prophets had to struggle with want and distress, but no want could hinder them from entering the community, or could induce them to separate. Life in common, in faith, in prayer, in the praise of God, was dearer to them than pleasant days, and enjoying the pleasure of sin. Where unity of spirit and true love call people together to a common meal, there is no need of great preparations and expensive dishes; they are readily satisfied with the simplest food.—*Lange.*

Verse 39. **Ignorance of simple things.** I. Inexcusable, because within the reach of all. II. Yet, alas! too prevalent. III. May be the occasion of fatal consequences.

Verse 40. **The deadly power of sin.** I. Mingles itself with the sweetest experiences of life. II. Causes many to turn with loathing even from their necessary food. III. Beyond all human power to conquer.

— It is often with spiritual good as it is with bodily good: it looks as if it were healthful and nourishing—*i.e.*, the words are beautiful and attractive—and yet there is soul-poison in it, which is destructive, if we are not on our guard.

Verse 41. What was there in the meal to counteract the bad properties of the gourds? Nothing, necessarily.

The meal, like the salt cast into the foul waters of Jericho (ii. 21), and the tree at Marah (Exod. xv. 25), was merely the suggestive symbol of the Divine powers of nourishment and healing which subsisted in Elisha's

God. It bore a similar relation to this miracle that Elisha's stretching himself upon the body of the dead child did to the Divine power that raised the child to life. It was the earthly medium through which the spirit worked. All the bad properties of the pottage were miraculously taken away. So, say some of the older divines, the healthsome meal of sound Christian doctrine, entering into the mind and heart of the church, shall counteract and take away the poison of ill-born heresy.

— Eminent goodness. I. Is not lifted above the commonest wants of life. II. Sympathizes with the needy and the suffering. III. Is the medium of timely relief.

HOMILETICS ON VERSES 42-44.

The Superabundant Goodness of God.

I. Provides for the daily wants of man. "Give unto the people that they may eat" (verse 42). How enormous are the thought and toil involved in supplying the daily wants of a simple city—*e.g.*, London! How unremitting the care, how affluent the goodness, of that God who supplies the multifarious and incessant demands of the world! Vast as is the consumption, the supply never fails. "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. cxlv. 15, 16).

II. Difficult for the unbelieving to appreciate. "What, shall I set this before an hundred men?" (verse 43). The selfish and unbelieving mind is blinded to the infinite resources of the Divine goodness: the limitation of the means is inadequate to the greatness of the need. But the eye only sees what it brings with it the power to see. The eye of faith sees what is invisible to the ordinary vision. True faith is undaunted, even when it sees only the last crust, and the last pot of oil. Necessity is a great test, and a great strengthener of faith.

III. Multiplies the little to supply the needs of the many. "And they did eat and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord" (verse 44). What seemed humanly insufficient, was so Divinely blessed as to be more than enough. A contented mind needs but little to ensure its happiness, while the abundance of the rich may fail to give satisfaction and peace. "Too much wealth is very frequently the occasion of poverty. He whom the wantonness of abundance has once softened, easily sinks into neglect of his affairs, and he that thinks he can afford to be negligent, is not far from being poor. He will soon be involved in perplexities which his inexperience will render insurmountable; he will fly for help to those whose interest it is that he should be more distressed, and will be at last torn to pieces by the vultures that always hover over fortunes in decay." It is the blessing of heaven that makes the little more, and teaches man when he has enough.

Lessons:—1. *The goodness of God is most evident in times of need.* 2. *Should be unhesitatingly trusted.* 3. *Should be gratefully adored.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 42-44. The grandeur and minuteness of Divine Providence. I. So blesses the earth that it provides for the wants of all. II. The scarcity of one locality is counterbalanced by the abundance of another. III. Does not overlook the commonest needs of man. IV. Makes a little go a great way.

— Jehovah ordered it so that a strange man, uncalled and unexpected, should bring to the prophet in a

time of famine the first fruits which belong to Jehovah according to law (Num. xv. 19, 20; Deut. xxvi. 2); and He blessed this gift so that it sufficed to satisfy the entire community of the prophets. The Lord himself, at the feeding of the five thousand, makes reference, not to this narrative, but to the feeding of the people with manna in the wilderness, and He gives to His miracle an express object and significance (John vi. 32) such as we cannot at all think of in this case. Besides that, the historical connection, the occasion, the persons, all are utterly different, and the asserted similarity is reduced simply to this, that through the Divine influence a little suffices for many—an altogether ordinary truth which pierces through many other incidents in the history of redemption which are entirely different from this one.—*Lange.*

— From the miracle of the healing of the bitter pottage it is appropriate to pass immediately to one by which a few barley loaves and ears of corn are made to supply the wants of many. As the one suggests the power of Divine truth to counteract the evils of heresy, the other may represent that not only must heresy in the church be offset with truth, but, to keep out heresy, the church must be abundantly fed with the true bread from heaven, which giveth life unto the world.—*Whedon.*

Verse 43. A covetous spirit. I. Would withhold from others even the necessaries of life. II. Has no faith in an abundance it cannot see; or in the axiom—"There is that scattereth and yet increaseth." III. Is often rebuked by acts of Divine generosity

Verse 44. Here is a specimen of the work of Christ in apostolic churches, receiving the alms of the faithful at God's altar, and seeking for true riches by bestowing those offerings, blessed by God with increase, to the benefit of His people.—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER V.

NAAMAN, THE SYRIAN LEPER.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Naaman was a great man with his master—גְּבוֹר חַיִל does not refer to mere physical force, but to the high esteem in which he was held at Court. Lord had given deliverances unto Syria—Not victories only, but national prestige, advantages, and prosperity. Verse 2. By companies—Marauding bands. These went out on predatory incursions. Verse 3. Would God—אֲחַלַי should be (as in Psa. cxix. 5), "O! that," an optative particle from חָלָה, which, in Piel, means to caress, to *beseech*. Verse 4. And one went in—*i. e.*, *he*, Naaman, went in. Verse 5. Ten talents of silver, &c.—The *silver* would value £3,421; the *gold* is not definite, but doubtless very considerable. Changes of raiment—These Oriental "holiday garments"—חֲלִיפוֹת בְּגָדִים—are costly state dresses, worn on festal occasions. Verse 7. King of Israel rent his clothes—Not from horror at the impiety of the thought; the unbelieving Jehoram was not likely to be so much troubled by the religious side of the case, as by the fear of a misunderstanding which might eventuate in war. And after the closing events of previous chapter, deserted as he then was, he had a barren outlook if war should arise. Verse 11. Strike his hand over the place—הָנִיף יָד—to wave the hand, or to stroke with it. Verse 12. Abana and Pharpar—The former, Amana, coming from the hill Amana, and now called Barady; the latter, also a small stream flowing from the Antilibanus, probably now called Fyjeh. Verse 13. My father—An address full of respect and regard. How much rather—as in 2 Sam. iv. 11. Verse 15. Take a blessing of thy servant—*i. e.*, a *gift*—בְּרָכָה—as in Gen. xxxiii. 10, 11. Verse 17. Shall there not then—Should read literally, "And Oh!" or, "And if not." Two mules' burden of

earth—For an altar (see Exod. xx. 24), under the idea that Jehovah would prefer the soil of His own land, on which sacrifices should be offered to Him by Naaman in Syria. Verse 18. House of Rimmon—רִמּוֹן, either from רָמַם, to be high; or רִמּוֹן, the pomegranate, the Oriental symbol of fruitfulness. Verse 19. A little way—*i. e.*, a length of country, as in Gen. xxxv. 16. Verse 21. He lighted down from the chariot—Not merely dismounted, but quickly did so, *sprang out of* the chariot, נָפַל, to *cast oneself*, to throw oneself, to *rush*. It indicates Naaman's anxiety. Verse 24. Came to the tower—הָעֹפֶל—*the* hill, *i. e.*, a hill well understood in the locality of Elisha's house. Verse 26. Went not mine heart—In contrast with Gehazi's words, "Thy servant went no whither." "My heart"—לִבִּי—*i. e.*, in spirit, discerning the entire transaction. Is it a time to receive money, &c.—*i. e.*, in any other case rather than this thou mightest have gratified thine avarice, but now, with so many hypocritical prophets abroad, this is no time for bringing the true prophetic office into disrepute by an act which seems to imply that the servant of the High God is only intent on selfish aggrandisement in his sacred and supernatural work.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-19.

Naaman a Picture of the Heathen in Search of Saving Truth.

The story of Naaman is full of bewitching interest, and is one on which volumes have already been written. It is so suggestive of spiritual analogies that it reads like a page of New Testament doctrine inserted in the midst of Old Testament history. Though dealing with simple facts of history that occurred nearly three thousand years ago, we cannot resist the temptation to interpret it in the light of the Christian ideas of the nineteenth century. It is a testimony to the liberal and impartial spirit of Judaism that does not refuse help to a foreigner, a heathen, and he belonging to a people who were the enemies of Israel. It recognised the religious needs of humanity; it was the bigotry and unfaithfulness of its adherents that made Judaism exclusive and intolerant. There were many Israelitish lepers in Elisha's time, but they were not cleansed, because they sought it not from the God of Elisha (Luke iv. 27). Naaman, the heathen, manifests a faith not to be found in Israel, and is cleansed of his leprosy. He thus prefigured the gentiles of a later age, who earnestly sought and found the salvation of God from which many Jews were cut off because of their unbelief. The whole narrative is the scheme of salvation epitomised. It may be viewed as *a picture of the heathen in search of saving truth.*

I. Like Naaman, the heathen enjoys many worldly advantages (v. 1).—By his strength and bravery Naaman had won the esteem of his king; he was loaded with honours, and surrounded with affluence and luxury. So the heathen lives among the fairest scenes of earth,

> Whose every prospect pleases,
> And only man is vile.

He is often raised to the highest dignities of earth, has unlimited command of wealth, and has the resources of commerce, science, art, and refinement ministering to his pleasure. Heathen is not always synonymous with barbarian. Some of the achievements of heathen genius have excelled the best productions of Western civilization. To be a heathen is not to be bereft of honour, of greatness, or of power.

II. Like Naaman, the heathen is suffering from a deadly disease.—"But he was a leper" (v. 1).—"Every man has some *but* or other in his character, something that blemishes and diminishes him, some alloy to his grandeur, some damp to his joy. He may be very happy, very good, yet in something or other not so good as he should be, nor so happy as he would be. Naaman was as great as the world could make him, and yet, as Bishop Hall quaintly remarks, the basest slave in Syria would not change skins with him." The heathen is smitten with the leprosy of sin. This tarnishes every worldly honour, blights the loveliest scene, dims the brightest prospects, moderates every joy, poisons every cup.

III. Like Naaman, the heathen hears, often through insignificant agencies, of the possibility of cure (verses 2-4).—A little captive maid, strong in her simple faith in the God of Israel, was the means of directing the proud but afflicted Naaman to the Divine source of healing. When she was borne away from her home and native land, it seemed very unlikely she would be instrumental in bringing the light of a higher truth to illumine the darkness of a heathen court. It has often happened in the history of nations that an obscure prisoner has been the means of acquainting his captors with the knowledge of the only true God; the vanquished has been crowned with a brighter glory than that of the conqueror. Numerous and extensive as are the various agencies of the Christian church in heathen lands, they are but feeble and limited compared with the greatness of the work to be done. "But God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty" (Cor. i. 27-29). The simple words of a solitary missionary, the artless conduct of a child, the stray teaching of a voiceless tract, the impression caused by a passing incident, may be Divinely blessed in leading a soul to light and truth and rest.

IV. Like Naaman, the heathen is intensely in earnest in seeking the means of deliverance (verses 5-9). The interest of Naaman is roused, a ray of hope enters his breast, his prejudice is conquered, and, laden with rich presents and attended by an imposing retinue, he journies into the land of Israel, and stands at the door of the prophet. He is conscious of his malady, is distressed with its unsightly ravages, and, sustained with the prospect of recovery, he counts no toil too great, no sacrifice too costly, if he may but gain relief. So the heathen, when convinced of his deplorable condition, and catching a glimpse of the promised remedy, seeks, with all the greedy avidity of need and all the cheering buoyancy of hope, the help that brings deliverance. The cry of awakened and struggling heathendom enters the ear of a merciful and all-powerful Saviour.

V. Like Naaman, the heathen is offended at the method prescribed for obtaining the needed cure (verses 10-12). Naaman expected that Elisha would come out to him, and make certain mysterious passes and signs, after the manner of a professional thaumaturge, and that the leprosy would vanish. It was a severe blow to his pride to be asked to bathe his stately though leprous limbs in the turbid waters of the Jordan, rather than in the clear limpid rivers of his native Damascus. The offence of the cross has not yet ceased. Heathens and Christians alike are offended at the simple terms of salvation. If it were necessary to do some exploit that would afford opportunity for the display of personal prowess and skill, thousands more would be eager candidates for salvation. But to repent—to confess sin—to submit to self-humiliation—to trust in the power and virtue of another, and the unseen and impalpable—this is too much for vain human nature, and stirs up a spirit of rebellion.

VI. Like Naaman, the heathen, when complying with the prescribed conditions, is cured of his deadly malady (verses 13, 14). The rage of Naaman passed away, but his leprosy remained. In his cooler moments he began to reflect. The gentle persuasions of those around him prevailed. He obeyed the prophet's directions, perhaps doubtfully, almost sullenly, but he did it. He dipped himself seven times in Jordan, and was healed. So when the heathen is persuaded to submit to the Divine terms, he obtains spiritual healing and renewal. Obedience is the pathway to clearer light, to the highest truths, and to the holiest experiences.

VII. Like Naaman, the heathen gratefully acknowledges and adores the power and goodness of God (verses 15-19). Who can describe the wonder and gladness of Naaman as he witnessed and felt the marvellous renovation! He hastens to the man of God to express his gratitude, to acknowledge the supremacy of Jehovah, and his determination henceforth to worship Him, to offer gifts, and to seek still further instruction. His ideas of Jehovah are still restricted. He is convinced of His superiority over all the gods of the Syrians, but he has not yet grasped the grand thought of the Divine presence being *everywhere*. "Now I know there is no god in all the earth *but in Israel*." So the heathen, after witnessing the saving power of God, sees the vanity of the idols in which he had trusted, and renders homage to the only true God. With further instruction his idea of Jehovah are expanded, and his worship is the more fervent and reverent.

LESSONS:—1. *Man everywhere is tainted with the moral leprosy of sin.* 2. *The remedy for human sin is universally available.* 3. *The eagerness of the heathen in search of saving truth is a significant rebuke to the apathy of multitudes in so-called Christian nations.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-19. The Divine method of healing sin-smitten souls. I. Is not restricted in its operation to any one nation under heaven. II. Is often revealed by humble instrumentalities. III. Is offensive to human pride and consequence. IV. Is effectual only with the humble and obedient. V. Is an inexhaustible theme for universal gratitude and praise.

LESSONS:—1. *Man would fain heal himself, but cannot.* 2. *Man's only hope of recovery is in believing submission.* 3. *All the power and glory of human salvation belong alone to God.*

Verses 1-14. Naaman the leper. 1. *The captive maid.* A prisoner in a strange land. Torn from home and friends. Carried with her both pity and piety. Had compassionate regard for the master who detained her in bondage, and a pious regard for the prophet of Israel. Did not harbour feelings of revenge.

> The fairest action of our human life
> Is scorning to revenge an injury;
> For who forgives without a further strife,
> His adversary's heart to him doth tie.
> And 'tis a firmer conquest, truly said,
> To win the heart than overthrow the head.
> *Lady E. Carew.*

II. *The proud general.* A commander of armies, himself the slave of a foul disease, and, worse still, of a proud heart. Must receive instruction of a slave. His visit to Elisha. Ostentatious arrival. His expectation. God's plans and human thoughts.

> Humble we must be, if to heaven we go;
> High is the roof there, but the gate is low:
> Whene'er thou speakest, look with lowly eye—
> Grace is increased by humility.
> *Robert Herrick.*

III. *The magnanimous prophet.* Willing to be the servant of man. Elisha is also a servant of God. can therefore

serve man only in God's way. Is willing to bless Naaman, though an enemy of Israel. Though he knows the restored health of Naaman may be employed against his countrymen. Cures Naaman, but will receive nothing for the cure. Might have exacted conditions—promises of peace. The character and conduct of Elisha an illustration of the mercy of God in a wicked age and amongst rebels. The mercy so luminous in the Old Testament shines in New also. One God of the whole Bible. Would not have any, even rebels perish.

LEARN:—1. *To forgive injuries.* 2. *To pity the unfortunate, even if your enemies.* 3. *To guard against pride.* 4. *Our cure is offered without money or price.—The Class and Desk.*

Verse 1. **The lights and shadows of life.** I. There is always something to modify the pleasures of human life—something to mar the most brilliant success—the fly in the ointment—the skeleton in the closet. II. Shows the universal prevalence of sin. III. Teaches the necessity for moderation and humility at all times. IV. May lead to the attainment of the highest good.

— **Honour with degradation.** I. *Naaman's honours* were as varied as they well could be, of war and peace, in the camp and in the place. He had the admiration of the soldiery and the approval of the king; was the trusted leader in battle and the favoured attendant in the house of Rimmon. Earthly honours may imply real dishonour before God, while real worthiness may involve a present degradation. According to the measure of our self-denial will ultimately be the measure of our honour. According to the excellence of our motives of self-denial will its worthiness be determined at the last; and the value of those motives depends always on and everywhere on the desire to serve and honour Jesus. Great and mainfold as were Naaman's honours, he seems to have deserved them. 1. He was a mighty man in valour. Strong and brave the man seems to have been; and bodily strength, and even animal bravery, are not to be despised or lightly esteemed. To speak to young men and women of might and valour, of health and bravery, is a Christian duty; for ominous signs of the lack of both abound. Many ways of living and spending time nowadays are keeping back the young from the might and valour, from the strength of body and fortitude of spirit, that come from God. 2. As a mighty and valorous man Naaman had been God's instrument in Syria's rise and prominence. In the front rank of honourable emotions is the love of country and of kin, honour to our race, and the sense of duty to our fatherland. The spirit of righteous patriotism is continually appealed to in the word of God, and sacrifice for the land of one's birth has been crowned by poet's praise and exalted by admiration. We may here notice the candour of the writer of this book and the breadth of his conception of the ways of the Lord, in that he ascribes Syria's military success to God; and that, too, at a time when Syria and Israel were continually at war. Every true deliverance of a soul or of a nation is of God. 3. Out of these things came Naaman's honours with his king and master. Peace as well as war brought him greatness, for he had the approval of him whom he served. Let us try to bring honour and give honour in all service, in the house or the warehouse, and be more than parts of a machine that works out its daily round and no more. There is room for honour everywhere, if one will give place to it; and, though lowlier than Naaman, we can each have his share of the honour that God gives to the valorous, the patriotic, and the faithful. II. But to this strong, valorous, honoured man's life there was another side—*of degradation and disappointment.* "He was a leper;" and though this in Syria had not the same terrible social consequences as in Israel, yet it was a blight and a curse. 1. Most lives have some qualifying, if not vitiating, of earthly joy and human credit. It must be horribly troubling to stand in God's beautiful world infirm and blemished when we would

be strong, humiliated when we might have been exalted, and degraded with bodily weakness in a world where self-asserting strength succeeds. 2. Sometimes these "buts," these humiliations of life, are self-made, coming out of the hotbed of our pride and love of consequence and attention. Morbid self-seeking will blight and embitter a life that might be happy and honourable. 3. But of more value is it to notice the sterling worth and bravery of Naaman, in that with the horrid degradation and disadvantage of leprosy he attained to glory and high esteem. To the young his name ought to stand as a bright light of encouragement, he being the man who, with a leper's hand, plucked honour from the red grasp of war, and made it no shame for a king to lean on a leper's shoulder. Think, in your humiliation, of Him who was "despised and rejected of men." And if we see shame on man's face, blemish on the body of his humiliation, and the degradation of death on his honour, can we not look up from disease and deformity and death, and see *the most suffering and dishonoured* — even Jesus — crowned with glory and honour?— Condensed from *Christian World Pulpit*.

— "But he was a leper." Not from his birth, nor yet to his death. Hence a learned writer compares the whole Church of Christ in all ages to this Naaman the leper. He was first pure and sound, and did many honourable acts, and thereby represented the Primitive Church, pure and clean, without spot or disease appearing; howbeit, there might be some secret seeds of diseases unperceived, which in continuance of time grew to a visible leprosy. In his middle time Naaman became leprous, diseased, and deformed, foully infected in himself, and infecting others; and thereby represented the latter Church of Rome. Afterwards, by the prophet's direction, he was washed and cleansed from his leprosy, and his flesh restored to become pure and perfect, like the flesh of a young child; and thereby represented the Reformed Churches. And as Naaman in all these three estates was the same person, and not a new, diverse, or several man, so our Church is not a new Church, but the old Church reformed from errors and corruptions, and restored to her ancient purity and soundness.—*Trapp.*

— Everywhere where there is, or seems to be, something great and fortunate, there is also a slight discordant *but*, which, like a false note in a melody, mars the perfectness of the good-fortune. A worm gnaws at everything pertaining to this world; and everything here below carries the germs of death in itself. We ought to consider all human suffering and misery worthy of consideration, wherever we find it. It is found everywhere; it dwells in the palace and in the hovel; it is interwoven with the life of prince and beggar, and it is inseparable from all worldly happiness. The poor and lowly have no reason to envy the rich and great. That which makes us happy in truth and for eternity does not depend upon rank or upon wealth.—*Menken.*

Verses 2-4.— **The power of a child.** 1. Unspeakably beneficent when religiously trained. 2. May excite a whole court with religious interest. 3. May be the means of great and lasting good. Naaman cured. God of Israel exalted. Undying interest of mankind in the incident. How much would the world have lost had the story of Naaman been unknown! "A small chink may serve to let in much light."

— **The ministry of little voices.** I. *The little maid's pity.* It seems as though the shame and grief of Naaman found opportunity of expression at home. So acutely did the sense of his dishonour show itself in his house, that the little slave maid one day exclaimed, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy!" Her "young-eyed" wonder saw what the strong and valorous soldier hid from all outside his home. Many a man's children see a look on his face and signs of agony

that the associates of daily life never think could belong to the strong and vigorous man, who, in their sight, fights the battle of life more manfully then they. There are known those who, honoured in public, in private wish themselves dead. As the joys that we can share with a child are the simplest and the purest, so those are the most blessed griefs that can touch the sympathy of a little maid. Let us try to bring our nature, our experience, our life, nearer the children. It may help us in sad days, if nothing else, just as this pity of the Hebrew girl led to the cure of Naaman's leprosy, and the liberation of his soul. The soul that is in sympathy with children will live a truer life because of it; and the man whose grief is pitied by a strange child in his household has some gentleness in him. God teaches us by "little voices" oftener than we think, and ministers to us by little hands that we seldom associate with the almightiness of God. All our little children are His messengers, and out of their mouths He wishes to ordain strength. "Little voices" call us home, as well as "God's all-animating voice," or rather God calls us by them. Just as the man whose child was lost in a mist that came suddenly down on one of the American rivers heard the little one calling, "This way, Father!" was led at last to hear the dead child's call as from heaven, whither, in that night of mist and sorrow, she had gone; so God leads many home by these angels in the clouds, these little ones, dead for awhile to us, but who are ever living unto God. II. Over against the little maid's pity we have now to set what looks like *her mistress's neglect*. The wife of Naaman let the word of the Hebrew girl go unheeded. Had the child more pity than the woman? Was the Hebrew slave more tender than the Syrian wife? Perhaps the child, from her Jewish training, had a pecular horror of leprosy and its shame, that the Syrian woman would not have. May we not, ought we not, to call one another's hearts to attend to the misery of sin? When God has linked hearts in home life, shall we slightly regard impenitence and uncleanness? Shall the parent cease to hope and pray for the prodigal child, and the goodly child be careless over a father or mother unsaved? If we wonder at the seeming apathy of Naaman's wife, what shall we say of many of ourselves, for neglecting the eternal welfare of each other's souls? While we wonder at this woman we condemn ourselves. III. *The wise listener*. Naaman was doubly fortunate in having, not only a pitiful slave girl, but another servant who listened wisely to what the girl said. He was certain of this, that, true or not, it was worth telling. So he "went in and told his lord." Our vitiated nature inclines us to speak of others only too readily when there is evil to be reported, too slowly when there is anything good. But here we have one ready to tell helpful news. Naaman must have been more fortunate in his servants and slaves than in his wife. IV. Now we come to the last link in the chain of influence and of persons that ultimately led to Naaman's recovery, and this is *the king of Syria*, the wisely acting king, who, when he heard only the report of a captive girl, said at once, "Go," and give a letter to the king of Israel. First there was the child, then the prudently listening servant, and then the wise king. Each was an agent of God in this matter; each was needed, and who shall say which was most necessary? Little hands have brought about great things, and feeble voices have often given its character to history. The boy dreamer Joseph telling his dreams is the occasion of four hundred years of Israelitish history. The little hand of the child Samuel was lifted by God, and his little voice was charged by God to show to Eli the coming of an awful doom. We know not how delicate is the balance of human affairs; but we know that God in His purposes unites the strong and the weak, and that when He touches the faithful, though they may be feeble, they become mightier than the strong.—*C. W. P.*

Verses 2, 3. The children's service

The little lady's maid.—Syria was a kingdom near to Canaan. For some time a little girl lived in Syria. She may not have been more than eight or ten years old. We wish to say *seven* things about her. 1. *This little girl was a Jewess.* Abraham was the first Jew. To him and his descendants God was exceedingly kind. How He spake to them, and what He gave them. This young person, as the text shows, was one of them. She belonged to the best land and the best people. What advantages she had. In this respect you are equal, yea, superior to her; Canaan and the Israelites then compared with England and the English now. A complete Bible and a Saviour who has come. To whomsoever much is given, of them much shall be required. 2. *This little girl was a slave.* The Syrians were the enemies of the Jews. Accustomed to go by companies to Canaan. Took away grain, cattle, and human beings. This girl was kidnapped on one occasion. Think on her sad condition, forced away from her land, home, friends, and parents.

Many children have been in the same circumstances. Rome, Greece, America, some even in the present day—Madagascar and Africa. "Slaves cannot breathe in England." Why? Education, government, above all, the gospel. Should you not believe it and love it? 3. *This little girl worked as a slave in the house of Naaman.* Naaman was the general of the Syrian army, and a great favourite with the king. He had plenty of money, and lived in a splendid house. He may have bought the little maid, or she may have been his share of the spoils of the war. At any rate, she was in his house, and waited on his wife. A lady's maid. From this we learn that, though young, she was clever, and did all her work well. Imitate her in these things; never be careless about what you do. Try to read, write, and spell, &c., in the best way, so in after-life you will do these things easily and well. This will be a great comfort to yourselves and others. 4. *This little girl was very kind.* Naaman, her master, had an awful disease—leprosy. It was painful, loathsome, and incurable by man. But Naaman had captured the little girl, and made her a slave. Had she been like some people, she would have been glad because her master was a leper. Instead of that, she thought about his disease. It was to her a source of sorrow, and she was anxious that he should be delivered from it. Here was kindness to one who had not been kind to her. This was the spirit of Jesus. Hear Him and see Him on the cross. It should be your spirit. You cannot have it without a new heart, any more than there can be a stream without a fountain. Because the little maid had the one, she had also the other. He who gave her a new heart will give you one. Ask Him for it. 5. *This little girl was exceedingly intelligent.* She spoke with wisdom to her mistress about her master and the prophet in the land of Israel. The prophet had never cured a leper (Luke iv. 27). How, then, did she believe that he would cure her master? Here we see her intelligence. She had heard of other wonderful things which the prophet had done. See the preceding chapter. This is how she reasoned:—Elisha, who, by the power of God, could raise a dead body to life, could also, if it pleased God, restore a diseased body to health. Wonderful reasoning for a little girl. Learn to put things together in your minds. Do this with your school lessons; when you are reading books, looking at persons, watching the birds flying, and the ships sailing. You will then be not dull, but clever, and so be able to push your way through the world. 6. *This little girl did a great amount of good.* She moved her mistress, the wife her husband, the husband the Syrian king, the Syrian king the king of Israel, the king of Israel the prophet. Naaman was delivered from his leprosy, and likewise from his heathenism. Besides, the whole narrative has been used by thousands to illustrate the Gospel, by which multitudes have been saved from sin to holiness. Similar results have been

produced by a single book, tract, action, or word. You can all do good; do it every day. 7. *This little girl was highly honoured.* By the attention she received from so many in Syria; by obtaining a place in the Bible; by having thousands speaking well of her, as we have been trying to do. Her case illustrates the text, "Them that honour Me, I will honour." Go ye and do likewise. Speak for God like her. Speak for others, and especially the suffering like her.

A. McAuslane, D.D.

Verses 5-14. Danger in the simplicity of God's ways. 1. *A prophet in Israel.* A kindly God in the earth, a healer of men abroad in all the lands, a loving presence with us in dark and troublesome days, a light lighting every man from his infant obscurity and slow ascent to the true vision of life, to the swift descent into the valley of the shadow of death. How few know and believe this! and how few of those who profess that they do can direct weary lives to it as they ought! And yet, if we cannot say more than this king, if we cannot enter into Elisha's confidence both for diseased bodies and dead or leprous souls, how sad are we! If for our bodies, and all the more if for our souls, we know no other help than man, and can turn only to one another in our necessities, we are little better than the king who rent his clothes over Naaman's leprosy, and knew not what to do. But there is a Divine healer in the earth now as then—a prophet and more than a prophet, who speaks to all human disease, and care, and helplessness. 2. *The prophet's confidence.* Elisha had the conviction that through himself Naaman might be healed. What a dignifying confidence in God this is for God's workers to have! for Elisha to know that God would cleanse by him, would save at his faithful word! We should have a confidence like Elisha's, at least the spirit of it. For every calamity that befalls men Jesus has a word of love and hope and deliverance. 3. *The leper's expectation.* It was just what we might look for from his success and honours and riches and power, and his ignorance. He evidently thought that Elisha would make much of him, since he had and could give so much. It was not so blameworthy in a Syrian heathen as it is now with many who seem to think that God, and the people of God, must make much of them if they come to God. We must not come with prejudices or fancies of our own knowledge and consequence to God and His word and people, for life and purity and health. God will not minister to any soul's self-consequence and self deceiving pride. 4. *The process of cure* was different from what Naaman expected. It was so absolutely simple, and because it was so simple it was so authoritative. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times." A child could understand it, a child could do it. So simple was it that only a proud, and therefore a foolish, man would resent it. God never makes His way hard, difficult, obscure, or involved. His simplicity is our salvation. 5. *The leper's pride.* There is much danger made by ourselves in the simplicity of God's ways, and many, like Naaman, stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, their unbelief rising because the way is so light and plain. In this we are exposed to a two-fold danger: that of the love of pleasure in religion, by which anything will pass for religiousness that excites or soothes our emotions enjoyably, and that of mingling our prejudices with our search for purity, and so clouding and hurting our sight of Jesus. These were practically Naaman's self-made dangers in the way of his leprosy being cleansed, and they are the old but ever new miseries of seeking after signs and wisdom, when all that God wants is the acceptance of His way and the use of His means of saving grace in our blessed Lord. 6. But Naaman was saved from utter folly by *the servant's good sense and his own true-heartedness.* The servant's word showed Naaman that the pride of a soldier was at the bottom of his refusal and rage. "If the prophet had

bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? That gives the explanation of his passion; there was too much of God in the plan of cure, and too little of self to make it attractive; there was too great a call on unobjecting obedience, and too little of self-pleasing to make it alluring. The same thing holds good of most of us. Do not let the simplicity of God's way become a hurt to your soul. By loving obedience end the uncleanness of sin for ever. 7. Following upon his trusting obedience came *Naaman's cure*. He was fresh and pure; with new life and new strength, pure life and pure strength. That was the end of his faith, as it will be of ours. Childlike and pure for ever is to be the soul's everlasting portion.—(C. W. P.)

Verses 5-7. **The ignorance and imbecility of man.** 1. Man is slow to apprehend the nature and cause of human suffering (verse 5). 2. Believes that money and diplomacy can accomplish anything (verse 5, 6). 3. Compelled to acknowledge his own powerlessness in dealing with human misery (verse 7). 4. Sees more his own danger than the divine teaching in the significant events of life (verse 7).

Verse 8. **The counsel of a good man.**—1. Valuable to king and court in times of difficulty. 2. Based on a profound faith in the power and goodness of God. 3. Prompted by gracious intentions towards the suffering and needy. 4. Tends to augment the reputation of true piety.

Verses 9-14. **The haughty suppliant.** God made the prophet, not the king, the *medium* of His blessings to Naaman. God selects His own workmen, and His selections sometimes chasten our pride. "His ways are not as our ways; neither are His thoughts as our thoughts." "It is neither by might nor by power." "He chooses the weak things to confound the wise."

Up to this point Elisha lived unappreciated, subsisting upon the hospitality of the Shunammite. And how often do God's nobility live and die unrecognized? They are men of whom the world is not worthy. They are unknown. And it is the obscure good which is the world's foundation, the salt of the earth. But by force of circumstances they become recognised. There are crises when we call for the good we have despised. God has many uncrowned kings—heirs of immortality in flesh. He cometh to make up His jewels, and they shall come from many an obscure place. "They shall come from the East and the West." "The last shall be first, and the first last." Many a Lazarus shall find his home in God's bosom, while the pampered beast shall become *worm*-food and *fire*-fuel.

There is much modern application in these Old Testament circumstances. There is so much humaneness in the Bible, which makes it always a new book. Principles know nothing of years. Truth is not hampered by time. The Scriptures are as old as eternity, and yet as new as every morning. *The Gospel in the narrative may thus be developed.* 1. **The gospel appeals to the man, not his accidents.** The prophet's message was to the *leper*, not to the *courtier*. Naaman came with his horses and with his pageantry. He came in a lordly air, but the prophet did not even *meet* him. The true man is never moved by glitter. Some of us would have bowed as sycophants; it would have been the reddest-letter day of our lives, if the premier of Syria had stood at our doors. Even if a trinket, or a book, be given to us by a royal hand, we transmit it as an heirloom. When will all this mammon-worship and man-homage, fawning, and cringing end? When will men remember that there is a higher kingliness—that instead of virtue cringing to vice, she should stand in her God-like form erect? There is a nobility of *office*, but there is a higher nobility of *character*. There is a kingliness of name, but there is also a kingliness of nature. We should not judge by appearance, but

judge by righteous judgment. The prophet saw through all the haughtiness of Naaman, a leprous man. God sees through all life's accidents—all our intelligence, parade, wealth, and respectability—a heart of corruption and sorrow. He sees that the "imagination of the thoughts of man are evil continually." The message is to man, not to his circumstances. It speaks to us as sinners. It speaks, not to contingencies, but to the human nature that is in us all. It was *man* that fell, and to *man* the message is sent. "He came to seek and to save *that* which was lost." 2. The gospel message and conditions are always simple. It speaks in a language all can understand. It speaks to the heart, and the heart has but one language the wide world over. The tongue speaks many a vernacular, and the lips chatter many dialects, but the heart's voice never varies. The great universal heart beats in us all. The gospel sees us fallen, and it sends forth the common message and a universal welcome, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden." The message is one, but its emphasis is varied according to our deafness, and its strokes to our hardness. The stone is hard, and the sculptor's mallet must be heavy and his chisels sharp. The wound is deep, and the corrosive must burn, and the instrument probe deeply. The jewel is encased in adamant, and the lapidary must select his instruments accordingly. Our prejudices are great, our hearts are haughty, and the conditions are adapted. *Christianity is to us what we are.* Loving in disposition, it speaks in a still small voice. Impenitent in heart, it speaks in thunder tones. Some are so deaf that they can only hear thunder, others are so divinely sensitive they can hear angels' whispers and God's steps on the wind. According to our heart-life, God is either a father, or a consuming fire. A revengeful God is the creation of a wicked life. The Gospel speaks to the heart, and of necessity must temper its voice to its disposition and difficulties. It is a message so simple that a child can understand it, and yet its inexhaustibleness challenges the highest minds. So plain, that the wayfaring man need not stumble, and yet its sublimity creates a sensation new in angel bosom. Its simplicity reveals its wonders, as its stoop manifests its height. 3. The gospel conditions are repulsive to human prejudices. We might swear that it is night when the sun shines, but the light would only prove our insanity. We may curse the book, but its truth is inviolable. We may blaspheme the Gospel, but the loudness of our voice may only reveal the perfectness of our idiocy. How presumptuous is man!

"Man, proud man, dressed in a little brief authority,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep."

1. How we presume on God's ways! "I thought he would surely come out to me," &c. 2. How we presume on God's means! "Are not Abana and Pharpar . . . . better than all the waters of Israel?" 3. How we presume on God's patience! "And he turned away in a rage." 4. How we presume on self-sufficiency! "Some great thing, would thou not have done it?" The conditions of the Gospel may arouse our resentment, but to resist is to be blind to our best interests. The prophet said: "Wash and be clean," and Naaman turned away in a rage. Christ says, "Sell all thou hast and give to the poor;" and the young man went away sorrowing. The Gospel says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and we are disgusted with the conditions. The answer to all our prejudices is—that *it is God's appointed way.* There is no royal road. The conditions are, believe and live; and the authority is, "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." Our prejudices may recoil, and we may turn away in wrath; but we turn our face from the sun only to see our shadow.—W. MINCHER in the *Study and Pulpit.*

Verses 9-12. Pride. 1. Fond of

splendid ostentation. 2. Indulges lofty expectations of notice and deference. 3. Is keenly sensitive to the sting of insult, whether intended or not. 4. Blinds the soul to its best interests. 5. Must be humbled before the soul can be blessed.

Verses 9, 10. The cure of Naaman. I. *Illustrative of the influence of humble instrumentality.* II. *Of the obstructive power of pride.* III. *Of the value of faithful counsel.* IV. *Of the blessedness of obedience.* 1. Naaman's obedience led to his obtaining a perfect cure. 2. Naaman's cure wrought in him true humility. 3. Naaman's cure led him to God. 4. Naaman's cure filled his heart with gratitude.—*E. Workman.*

Verses 10-12. Naaman, an example of barriers to religious decision. I. *The barrier was his own disposition.* II. *His choosing the means.* III. *His wanting to do something.* IV. *His not applying the remedy.*—*H. Bone.*

Verses 11, 12. We, knowing much better than Naaman did, the character and claims of Elisha, are apt to be amazed at the petulance and pride of Naaman. Yet, in fact, there are few of us—are there any?—who have not manifested many times in the course of our career, as much or more resistance to the demands upon our faith, and to the exigencies appointed by God for the humiliation of the proud mind of the flesh, than ever Naaman did, and often with far less reason. Let us rather admit that the demand upon the faith of Naaman, and the extent to which he was required to bend down his natural reason, formed somewhat of a severe exertion from one so raw and inexperienced in the things of God. Yet it is the common course of the Lord's dealings with those whom He brings under the operation of His healing grace. The course is paternal. As a father deals with his children, so He deals with us. He demands obedience, exacts submission. He requires faith; and then, the mind being brought into the right state, He teaches, He leads, He heals.—*Kitto.*

Verse 12. Is there not another way? I. *Sinners dislike the plan of the Gospel.* 1. Self-abandonment. 2. Salvation by faith. II. *They dislike its object.* 1. Salvation from sin. 2. The renewal of the heart. III. *They dislike the means to be used.* 1. Self-denial. 2. Humility. 3. Earnestness. 4. Publicity.

Verses 13, 14. The soul's desire and submission.—I. *A desire is frequently shown to do some great thing to obtain salvation.* Illustrate from heathen pilgrims, Fakirs; devotees who used to cast themselves under wheels of Jaggernaut, also Roman Catholic austerities, self-flagellations, crusades, &c. Both (1) condemn and (2) approve. The form in which such zeal shows itself superstitious. The motive wrong. But earnest self-sacrificing spirit prompted by love to Christ very admirable. What is not permissible is seeking to do something as procuring cause of salvation. First receive as a free gift, and then give and do as much as the heart will prompt. II. *The simplicity of what has to be done, and consequently urgent reason we should do it.* (*a*) Because no act of ours could be allowed to atone for sin—(*b*) the work of Christ complete, needs no addition—(*c*) a free salvation comes within reach of all. Who could say, if otherwise, but that even in our great things, there might be some coming short, and multitudes would be excluded from hope? All the more, then, rejoice that the command is "Believe and live," yet, remember, there is wide scope afterwards, especially a daily life of patient piety and godliness, often more difficult than a single act of self-devotion. In this fulfil the desire and glorify God. III. *The wisdom and blessedness of obedience.* Picture the scene. So when humbled, anxious, submissive, a sinner adopts the means of mercy, there is (1) a Divine, (2) an instantaneous, (3) a lasting effect. From darkness to, light unregeneracy

to renewal. How wise the obedience! The only chance of recovery. How blessed! It must have been sweet to feel the past cancelled, heart set right. Men have fabled there is a fountain of youth. Plunge in its waters and the wrinkles fade out of the brow. But it is true we may be made young and happy again in spirit—children of God.—*Hom. Quarterly.*

Verse 13. **The art of persuasion.**—I. Knows when to select the right moment to speak. II. Knows how to subdue the most violent temper. III. Appeals to the strongest motive in man. IV. Should be used in turning men from sin to virtue.

Verse 14. It was not the water either of Jordan or of Abana which could heal, it was the obedience of this haughty general to a mandate which seemed to him frivolous and absurd. In the Gospels faith is the first requisite in similar cases of healing, and so it was here also—faith and obedience. Naaman came with his mind all made up as to how he was to be healed, and he turned away in anger and disgust from the course which the prophet prescribed. Yet, when he turned back even with a lame and half-doubting faith and a half-unwilling obedience, he was healed. This is the permanent truth which is involved in the story. Naaman was a type of the rationalist whose philosophy provides him with *a priori* dogmas by which he measures everything which is proposed to his faith. He turns away in contempt where faith would heal him. That is the truth which the story serves to enforce.—Editor of *Lange.*

Not the unjust fury and tetchiness of the patient shall cross the cure; lest while God is severe the prophet should be discredited. Long enough might Naaman have washed there in vain, if Elisha had not sent him. Many a leper hath bathed in that stream, and hath come forth no less impure. It is the word, the ordinance of the Almighty, which puts efficacy into those means which of themselves are both impotent and improbable. What can our font do to the washing away of sin? If God's institution shall put virtue into our Jordan, it shall scour off the spiritual leprosies of our hearts, and shall more cure the soul than cleanse the face.—*Bp. Hall.*

God's plan of salvation. We take the narrative as illustrative of the great truth, the necessity of conforming with God's plan to secure salvation. I. *That God's plan is contrary to the expectations of man.* So it was here that Naaman had been thinking within himself how the prophet would act. He merely sent a messenger commanding him to wash in the Jordan. How simple, and so he thought, how foolish! The very simplicity bewildered him and kindled his wrath. But if his own plan would have been sufficient, he might have cured himself without going to the prophet at all. So the salvation which is in Christ Jesus has always been a stumbling block to men on account of its simplicity, and many have dogged the simple Gospel with innumerable ceremonies of men's devising, painting the pure lily, and bringing their own faint rush-light to increase the splendour of the noonday sun. Men would cross ocean and wander in far-off lands in search of wisdom; they would survey the heavens, and descend to the lowermost parts of the earth; but God's word of life is nigh unto us, in our mouth and in our heart.

"O, how unlike the complex works of man
Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan!
From ostentation as from weakness free,
It stands like the cerulean arch we see,
Majestic in its own simplicity;
Legible only by the light they give
Stand the soul-quickening words, *believe and live.*
COWPER.

II. *That God's plan tends to humble the pride of man.* Naaman thought there was some royal cure for a royal patient, and an honourable way to deal with such an honourable man. How indignant he felt when the prophet only sent a messenger to him, and the remedy prescribed being so humiliating too. He could not understand going to wash himself in the river Jordan, the river of despised

Israel; whilst if it was necessary to apply the waters of any river, could he not have washed himself in the proverbial crystal streams of Damascus? "So he turned and went away in a rage." So God's plan of salvation is mortifying to the pride of the sinful heart. The Pharisees were offended at the Saviour for making no distinction between them and the *sinners*. They were entangled in the snares and pride of life. Their plan was to glorify self and humble others; but to enter the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the first step required is for a man to deny himself. Faith consists in leaving our own frail vessel and taking our passage on board the ark of God, to deem ourselves nothing and God all in all. We find Peter, having received the consent of the Master, walking on the sea; but the moment he began to trust *himself*, and feel safe in the power of his own strength, the boisterous winds and the treacherous waves frightened him, and, conscious of his weakness, he with gladness entered the ship and was "safe in the arms of Jesus." The gate is strait and the road is narrow, but he who is humble and obedient is led at last to safety and bliss. 3. *That he who truly feels his need will accept God's plan.* Though Naaman was at first most seriously disappointed, and turned away in a rage, yet on the counsel of his servants, strengthened by his own need and his inward conviction, he complied with the directions given by the prophet. A sense of need is a propelling power that will work wonders, and, in conjunction with faith, will send the mountain to the sea, and chain the lion that is on the way. This feeling impelled that poor woman to force her way through the crowd and touch the hem of the Saviour's garment; and, urged by the same motive, the blind man willingly went to the lake of Siloam. When the sinner really feels sin a burden, and believes that the meek and lowly Jesus is powerful to remove it, he will not quarrel with the method of salvation, but will come at once and cast his burden down; and when he truly feels his guilt he will come to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. When a man is bent upon becoming rich, or learned, or great in the estimation of the world, he is willing to comply with the world's terms, be they ever so hard. Is it wonderful that the sinner, with his broken heart and contrite spirit, closes in with the overtures of the gospel, and accepts the salvation which is in Christ? IV. *That conformity to God's plan will secure a man's salvation.* Naaman obeyed, and he was accordingly cured. 1. *Some means are generally used.* The miracles of the Old and New Testaments are similar in this, that means were used in bringing about such wonderful deeds. It would have been all the same to God to cure Naaman with a word, but Naaman himself would have lost the valuable lessons he received, and the necessary training he went through. 2. *The means were not sufficient in themselves* apart from the blessing of God to cure his leprosy, but as it was God's plan it effected its purpose. The ark was rendered safe from the waters of the Deluge, as it was constructed according to the directions given by God. The waters of Marah lost their bitterness by a tree being thrown into them, because that was the means appointed by the Lord. To encompass the walls of Jericho with rams' horns might have seemed very foolish and useless to some, but it was of Divine appointment, and so it succeeded. Men are thus taught to do their duty, and then to wait for the Divine blessing. Naaman could wash himself in the Jordan, though he could not cure himself. We are to come to the Saviour to be healed, we are to look upon Him, to stretch out our hands, withered as they are, to Him. 3. *Naaman's cure was instantaneous.* What a happy moment for him when he discovered that the cause of his anxiety, trouble, and humiliation was removed! So the man who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, and flees to Him for refuge, is from that moment free from condemnation. 4. *His cure was complete.* His flesh was made like

the flesh of a little child. He possessed a thoroughly renovated body. No taint of the malady to cast its dark shadow over the future. So he who accepts God's plan is wholly renewed, created anew in Christ Jesus. True, he retains the marks of the leprosy of sin whilst in this world. As Mr. Joseph Cook remarks, although the particles of the body have been changed many times, still the scars made when the fingers were too young to be trusted with edged tools continue through the years, and are absolutely unchangeable in the changing flesh, so the scars of sin continue after years of reformation; but, thanks be to God, day by day the nature becomes sanctified, and at last the ransomed soul will take its flight to the realms of purity and bliss. The Church will be at last a "glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; holy, and without blemish."—*Hom. Quarterly.*

Verses 15-19. Gratitude to God and earthly policy. Naaman, instead of going straight away to Syria, turned back to Samaria, not this time to the king, but with the same retinue and wealth of gifts he came back to Elisha's door. In this act he takes his place with that one Samaritan leper of the New Testament who turned back to Jesus and blessed Him for His mercy in freeing him from the same horrible curse, while nine others went away healed, but ungrateful. I. Naaman's journey back was *a grateful return to Elisha and an honourable but only dutiful acknowledgment of God.* It was an owning of the God of Israel because of Elisha's work. This deduction of spiritual truths from bodily blessings shows health of soul and soundness of mind. Naaman recognized God *by His mercies*, and acknowledged the God of Elisha in the work that *Elisha had done.* Mercy is the great mark of our God; it is that by which He may be most easily recognized; and works of mercy are the signs of the true and most eminent servants of His pleasure. God is ready to let His claim on our loving recognition be determined by what every heart can easily discover of His merciful kindness. His message and work among us are still the same; His servants and workers now are all, if they are true to Him, workers of mercy, messengers of love and peace and healing. II. *Elisha's refusal of wealth.* In this, like Abraham with the King of Sodom, and like Paul with the Corinthians, Elisha kept the mercy of God as God intended it to be, "without money and without price." The true gift in return for God's mercy is the offering of ourselves in Christ, and when that is made the silver and the gold will find their proper place. It was noble in Naaman to make the offer; and it would have been wrong in Elisha to have taken the gift. The greatest blessings cost, at first, the least. No one can be paid, no one can pay, for the mercy of God, or for the conferring of spiritual blessings. God gives us His mercy, and He wants ourselves as His right and due. III. *Ignorant devotion to the true God.* Only a little while ago, in rage and pride, Naaman had sneered at the waters of Israel; but now the soil of the land of the Lord was sacred to him, and he wanted an altar of it in his Syrian nome. Nor for this is he to be condemned, as we should be justified in condemning the like spirit when it is foisted upon the purity of Christianity or associated with the faith once committed to the saints. Christianity knows nothing of exclusively holy places and days and services and classes; for now all places and times may be sacramental and holy to the Lord. IV. There was, however, in Naaman's case a worse thing than his excusable superstition, and that was —*an attempt to mingle the claims of God with the advantages of earthly policy.* It is not for us or any to press heavily on the conscience of a man in such a position. The only thing that gives us a right to judge the case at all, for our own caution and guidance, is the evidence that Naaman himself felt that bowing down with his master in the house of Rimmon might be inconsistent with his proposed devotion to the God of Israel. From Naaman's

easily understood mistake let us learn to hate laxity of principle in ourselves, and to judge gently the weakness and fall of others. V. From *Elisha's tenderness to a weak convert*, learn the more to trust the greater tenderness that Jesus has for our frailties and dangers. Do not think that Jesus does not see the wretchedness of your temptations and the hazard of your position when all things seem to beckon you to sin, and sin hides its vile image under a mask of attractiveness and interest and prosperity.

Then learn to scorn the praise of men,
And learn to lose with God;
For Jesus won the world through shame,
And beckons thee His road.

C. W. P.

I. Gratitude. The mighty Naaman, who had doubtless often bathed without benefit in the waters of Damascus, tried the river Jordan, and was immediately cleansed. He returns to Elisha to thank him. How different now is Naaman, old things passed away! He acknowledges the supreme God as the only God. Does this publicly in the presence of all his company. Would make an acknowledgment to Elisha, not as a recompense, but as a gift of gratitude. **II. Generosity.** Elisha by no means a man of great wealth. Dependent on the bounty of Providence. Followed no regular calling. Lived in an age when the servants of God, as such, were ill-rewarded. Yet would not receive a gift at the hands of Naaman. His desire to lay Naaman and the king of Syria his master under an obligation to Israel. This is to preserve peace. Especially he desired to impress them with the greatness and goodness of God; to remind them of those higher blessings which God would freely give. Hence, for the sake of God's honour, and his country's welfare, he would take no reward. **III. Superstition.** Although thus grateful, and making his confession of the true God, Naaman is not fully enlightened. Still regards God as a local deity. The mightiest God in the world, but limited to Israelitish soil. He would therefore like to carry back with him some of that soil. He thought to worship in any spot on that soil would secure the favour of God. Elisha makes no reply to this request. Certainly cannot approve this course. Sends Naaman back with his blessing. Naaman felt that to worship Rimmon was wrong, but hoped to be forgiven by him on whose consecaated soil he stood. LEARN:—1. *To cultivate gratitude.* 2. *To do good without the hope of any return.* 3. *Guard against all forms of superstition.*

The Class and Desk.

Verse 16. The unselfishness of goodness. I. Cannot be bribed into showing kindness. II. Refuses legitimate offerings when the cause of religion would suffer by accepting them. III. Falls back upon God for all needful supplies.

Verses 17, 18. Imperfect religious ideas. I. Not uncommon at the early stage of religious life. II. Leads to imperfect religious practice III. Attaches too much importance to the externals of worship. IV. Hinders a thorough reformation and forsaking of the old life.

Verse 17. As Naaman was the type of the converted heathen world, and he carried the soil of Palestine to Aram, so did the heathen carry over into their own lands, together with Christianity, the doctrine, life, disposition, and spirit, which had flourished in the Holy Land, and thereby they established themselves a new home. When we hear, here and there in Christian lands, the names Bethany, Bethlehem, Zion, what are they but holy places transferred, in their spirit, from their original location, into our life, and thought, and feeling? In their religious observances, the main point is not the correctness and truth of thy knowledge, or of the doctrine which thou professest, but the truth and purity of thine own character. What one may do under his circumstances without violating his conscience, the conscience of another, under other circumstances, will forbid him to do. We have no right to judge him: to the Lord each

one stands or falls (Rom. xiv. 1—7). —*Cassel.*

— Well did this Syrian find that the man of God had given a supernatural virtue to the water of Israel, and therefore supposed he might give the like to his earth. Doubtless it was devotion that moved this suit. The Syrian saw God had a propriety in Israel, and imagines He will be best pleased with his own. On the sudden was Naaman half a proselyte; still here was a weak knowledge with strong intentions.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 18. **The compromises of life.** The significant *but* in the social position of Naaman is to find its counterpart in his religious character. A great man, but a leper; a believer pleading for an inconsistency. Conversion and compromise. When he has found God beyond the sign of water, and come back to the prophet with the confession of his new faith, you expect a complete change in his exterior life, that he will go among his heathen countrymen a full-orbed religious man; but he counts the cost, or perhaps is in some mental perplexity. At least he will put the difficulty to the prophet, and be guided by his decision. We are startled to hear the answer "Go in peace." Here was an opportunity to rebuke cowardice, to chastise the poor selfishness that, having received so much from God, asks, "And how little need I pay back?" An opportunity to discuss an interesting question of casuistry and to decide upon the comparative forces of conscience and necessity. But Elisha accepts his convert, with this exception, whether in the passive non-aggressiveness of that old Hebrew religion, or in the conviction that the man would do his best under the circumstances, we cannot tell. Set Naaman in the light flung back by the cross, and we can soon pronounce judgment. We know our Lord deals with these human "buts." "Let the dead bury their dead," &c. "If a man love father and mother more than me, he is not worthy of me." But the judgment would be unjust. Men are always more or less in subjection to the ideas that govern the age in which they live. It is only the few who draw themselves apart, and press forward to a grand isolation. The Church has ten thousand Naamans where it has one Paul. The very uncertainty in which, spite of Elisha's benediction, the incident is left, suggests some remarks on the compromises of life.

I. *Religious decision, as it is affected by earthly relationships.* This man was a servant, and the conditions of his servitude were not simple, but complex. He was in command of the army, and while this conferred on him a large authority, it imposed a large trust. These had opened to him wide opportunities for loyalty, bravery, and patriotism. It was part of his service to go with his master into the house of Rimmon. Refusal would take on it an ugly air of ingratitude. The king had made him the man he was, and a feeling of indebtedness and obligation may enter very acutely into questions of conscience and right. This to a noble mind would be a far greater difficulty than the loss of position and the imminent death that might result from the wrath of an absolute monarch, unaccustomed and unable to enter into nice questions of religious casuistry; indeed, the line of duty between the obligations imposed by earthly relationships, and our services to God, is not always so distinct as men think. Many at least who, with loud protestations, scorn all compromise, have never found that line. Clear is the right, at all sacrifice, if king or master exact the positive crime; ask me to disown Christ, to give up prayer, to outrage any distinct conscientious conviction, but along this line is a very borderland of mist in which the traveller is often brought to a stand, asking after the right way. It is enough to instance questions of polygamy, of slavery, with which the early Church had to deal. Of course it may be said, if a heathen, having two or more wives, became a convert, he must put away all but one. Which one? What if each were the mother of

children? The Christian master must manumit his slaves. Cornelius, says the Peace Advocate, should forsake the Roman service, and take no longer the heathen's pay. But these, and a multitude of similar questions, are not decided by inspired authority at all, or are decided in their special instances against the ruling principle. The New Testament has faith in time, in the thousand years of God's working, in the antagonism of the spirit of the Gospel to every form of injustice and wrong. It cares less to estimate and adjudge the differing shades of darkness in the night of error, so much as to bring in that daybreak before which all the shadows shall flee away. Christianity has entered as a sword into many a worldly home, happy in its own way; it has resulted in wide divisions between parent and child, master and servant, monarch and subject. The records of the Church glow with bright instances of heroic sacrifice, of daring disobedience to man in obeying God. And yet how much has to be borne, how much ought to be borne, before the daughter forsakes her mother, or the son breaks asunder the bond of the household! There is much in Naaman's knowledge of the inconsistency. He who sins against that inner light will be scarcely free from sin against God.

II. *By society.* Naaman does not refer to the difficulty of maintaining a monotheistic faith in a pagan land, to the power of many against the one; but society is full of suggested compromises resulting from these conditions. There is a compulsion in the pressure both of social forces and of civil laws; and many a man discovers that the house of Rimmon is co-extensive with the state in which he lives. He pays the tribute money to Cæsar, or the temple tax, withholding faith in the lawful government in the one, and really teaching that the other must pass away. He takes up his share of the country's expenditure, though part of it may go toward objects from which he conscientiously dissents. His plea is the necessity of his position; but his neighbour takes that plea to a far wider field, and justifies many a compromise on the same ground. It is convenient to charge our personal responsibility on an intangible irresponsible something called society. But what society is to supply our code of ethics? Syria or Israel? England or Fiji? Every man shall bear his own burden. The law of truth is in and from the changeless God. Customs, fashions, luxurious living, appearances, amusements, friendships, business, all tempt to compromise and have prophets God never sent, who say to the conformist, "Go in peace."

III. *By the necessities of life.* The plea, we must do this to live. Refer to common practices in trade, the pressure of competition. The world's practices contrary to the great principle. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.

IV. *By the personal temperament.* One man's supreme difficulty is another man's agreeable work. The cost of sacrifice differs with different men. To one it is easier to die on the battlefield than to confess his faith—to give largely, even to Gehazi, with generous or grateful subscriptions, than to break with former friendships. There is no open confession of Christ's name by secret disciples, to whom One greater than all prophets may say, "Go in peace." Let character only be of so pure a transparency that the light of a holy conscience may shine through. 1. God does not take back from men of partial failure the good he has bestowed. The leprosy does not return to the cleansed leper, if one leprous spot be on the soul. The impotent man healed, goes straightway to our Lord's enemies to tell them that it was Jesus who made him whole, and the strength ungratefully used remains. We have all need to say, somewhere, "The Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." 2. Is the silence of Scripture as to any useful future in Naaman's history to be regarded as evidence of a good life hin-

dered by the appearance of evil? 3. We shall destroy no house of Rimmon by worshipping in it on any pretence whatsoever. 4. In the Gospel, this, at least, is clear—he that putteth his hand to the plough, and *looketh* back, is not fit for the kingdom of God.—*Hom. Quarterly.*

— Far, therefore, is Naaman from being a pattern, save of weakness; since he is yet more than half a Syrian; since he willingly accuses himself, and, instead of defending, deprecates his offence. As nature, so grace, rises by many degrees to perfection. It is not for us to expect a full stature in the cradle of conversion. Leprosy was in Naaman cured at once, not corruption.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 19. One does not know what to admire most in Elisha's mild and simple answer, the clear and correct insight into a genuine heart experience, which, whatever may surround and obscure the main point, at once seizes this quickly and clearly; or the holy moderation which, even in the case where it is its prerogative to urge, limit, bind, loose, or burden, still restrains itself; or the pure humanity of disposition which can so thoroughly sympathize, so completely put itself in the position and at the standpoint of the other. The knowledge of the living God, and the experience of His saving grace, is the fountain of all peace, with which alone a man can go gladly on his way.—*Menken.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 20-27.

The Curse of Avarice.

I. That a spirit of avarice loses no opportunity to gratify its greed. Gehazi was the Judas Iscariot of the Old Testament. Covetousness was his besetment. He was doubtless in many ways valuable to Elisha, and perhaps was at first a sincere enquirer after truth. But the spirit of avarice gained the mastery over what was good in him, and ultimately wrought his ruin. The wealth of Naaman was too great a temptation to him, and he could not forego the prospect of benefiting by the lavish generosity of the grateful Syrian. "As the Lord liveth, I will run after him and take somewhat of him" (verse 20). Gehazi acts under the guise of religion while disregarding its teaching of disinterestedness, which it was particularly needful to make evident in those days of worldliness and time-serving among the national priesthood—the sycophantic Baalites. He showed contempt for the judgment of his master in the matter of receiving gifts, and cared not how far he disparaged the prophet in the eyes of his new convert. He mainly misrepresented Elisha by making him ask for what Naaman had just heard him most positively refuse. Avarice knows no scruples; is reckless of results; it sees only what is to be gained, and cannot relinquish the slightest hope of securing it.

II. That a spirit of avarice hesitates not to employ falsehood in attaining its purpose. Covetousness and lying go together; they are twin-vices. The burning desire for gain suggested to Gehazi the fabrication of a plausible story which would easily deceive the unsuspecting and generous Naaman (verses 21-23). "What a round tale hath the craft of Gehazi devised of the number, the place, the quality, the age, of his master's guests, that he might set a fair colour upon that pretended request, so proportioning the value of his demand as might both enrich himself, and yet well stand with the moderation of his master! Love of money can never keep good quarter with honesty, with innocence. Covetousness never lodged in the heart alone; if it find not, it will breed wickedness. What a mint of fraud there is in a worldly breast! How readily can it coin subtle falsehood for an advantage!" To find out the covetous, go round with a subscription book. It is perfectly appalling what lies you will hear told to evade giving.

III. That a spirit of avarice finds its pleasure in secretly storing its gains (verse 24). Gehazi carefully stowed away the goods with which the liberality of Naaman had supplied him, and began already to indulge in dreams of increased possessions and of the pleasures his wealth might purchase. The miser wastes his best powers in the fond idolatry of his money, and gloats in secret over the piles of treasure which he counts with trembling joy. Avarice, says Channing, is a passion full of paradox, a madness full of method; for although the miser is the most mercenary of all beings, yet he serves the worst master more faithfully than some Christians do the best, and will take nothing for it. He falls down and worships the God of this world, but will have neither its pomps, vanities, nor its pleasures for his trouble He begins to accumulate treasure as a means to happiness, and by a common but morbid association he continues to accumulate it as an end. He lives poor to die rich, and is the mere jailer of his house and the turnkey of his wealth. Impoverished by his gold, he slaves harder to imprison it in his chest, than his brother slave to liberate it from the mine. The avarice of the miser may be termed the grand sepulchre of all his other passions, as they successively decay. But, unlike other tombs, it is enlarged by repletion and strengthened by age.

IV. That a spirit of avarice is unexpectedly exposed and faithfully warned (verse 25, 26). Little did Gehazi think that the whole transaction which had been carried out with such consummate craft and privacy was already known to his Master. He seeks still further to hide his duplicity by further lying. "He who tells a lie," says Pope, "is not sensible how great a task he undertakes; for he must be forced to invent twenty more to maintain one." The wickedness of his servant was discovered by the prophetic insight of Elisha, and, to the utter confusion of the culprit, he is addressed in words of severe and faithful remonstrance—"Is it a time to receive money, &c?" Miserable Gehazi! how didst thou stand pale and trembling before the dreadful tribunal of thy severe master, looking for the woful sentence of some grievous judgment for so heinous an offence!" It is well when the money-loving worldling has a faithful monitor at hand to warn him of his danger and reprove him for his sin: it is better still when warning and reproof lead to reformation.

V. That a spirit of avarice is cursed with a terrible doom (verse 27). Swift upon the heels of the transgression came the punishment, and that a punishment most loathsome and abhorrent: it was like a living death!—"He went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." O heavy talents of Gehazi! O the horror of this one unchangeable suit which shall never be but loathsomely white, noisomely unclean! How much better had been a light purse and a homely coat with a sound body, a clear soul! Too late doth that wretched man now find that he hath loaded himself with a curse, that he hath clad himself with shame. His sin shall be read ever in his face, in his seed. All passengers, all posterities, shall now say—Behold the characters of Gehazi's covetousness, fraud, sacrilege!—*Bp. Hall.* Perhaps the punishment cured the sin, and led to repentance. Gehazi the leper had more hope of salvation than Gehazi the miser. Gain got by a lie will burn your fingers, burn in your purses, rot your estates, and root out your posterity.

LESSONS:—1. *The love of money is the root of all evil.* 2. *The avaricious spirit is ever ready to take advantage of the generous.* 3. *Covet earnestly the best gifts.*

DEFILEMENT OF GOD'S WORK BY COVETOUS MEN (verses 20-24).

It is saddening to know that some of the best works, and some of God's most eminent workers, have been defamed and lowered, if their influence has not been actually counteracted and nullified, by inferior workers and by unworthy men.

This defiling of God's work has generally come from one source, and is the result of one vile lust or passion—covetousness. As illustrating this, read the repulsive histories of Balaam, of Achan, of David's impious numbering of Israel, the story of Gehazi now before us, and the dark atrocity of the life and death of Judas Iscariot.

I. The action and duplicity of Gehazi are of singular unworthiness. Like so many other histories, they show *that intercourse with good men and association with God-like work may become only the occasion of more vileness in a man.* To the influence of his noble-minded master, to the refining and elevating power of such a character as Elisha, to the special needs of his fatherland and day, Gehazi seems to have been insensible, or, if not insensible, yet, which is worse, inclined to undervalue them, and to use the privileges and opportunities of his position for the gain of money. Nor is Gehazi lonely in this. On every side evidence of the like iniquity accumulates when we look into Scripture or other history. Few followers of great men have any of their real greatness, though they may share their honour. Few imitators of great teachers catch sight of anything but their own false exaggeration of their master's position, and the opportunities thereby given of personal advance. The followers of Luther were seldom worthy of him. The followers of Calvin have not been true to their master. The adherents of the hallowed Wesleys did not take their sacred work only. The converts of Paul almost broke his heart. And the followers and servants of Jesus—where is there one of us who is worthy of his master? Do not many of us come to Christ with selfish feelings and serve our God for hire? We may find it helpful against this danger ever to remember that God's gift of salvation was both *undeserved* and *unsolicited.* Being with the good and great will not necessarily make us similar; otherwise Gehazi would have been a better man, and it would not have been Christ's sorrowful experience that "he who had eaten bread with Him lifted up his heel against Him."

II. Gehazi's covetousness was of a gross, material kind—the love of money; and the miserable influence of it upon him is seen in this—*that it produced inability to appreciate Elisha's spiritual motives.* All that Gehazi let himself see was that with the departing Naaman so much money went away too. As with Gehazi, so generally the covetous and unprincipled man lowers himself to a level on which he is unable, in daily life and business, to appreciate other motives than those of getting gain, or measure anything in life's movements and enterprises by any other gauge than that of the money that can be gained or must be lost. Gehazi could not feel the power of Elisha's spiritual motives in sparing Naaman and letting him go free of payment. Elisha's noble determination that the mercy of his God should, in Naaman's case, be had literally for the asking; his resolve that the goodness of God should be then, as we say now, of grace, and not of buying or selling—this, to such a soul as Gehazi's, was useless, fanciful, intangible. He was, evidently, a practical vigorous man, who had not much room for fancies, whether religious or any other. Covetous men in the world, and Gehazis in the Church, are too many and too influential. Too many of us have this coarse grain in us, and when there is ever any beauty or tenderness of feeling in us, we get into the habit of hiding it from what we think would be the rude looks and unappreciating touch of others.

III. In several other ways *Gehazi's covetousness involved him in sin*, and further defiled the good work that had been wrought by Elisha. These are no lonely, single sins. Sin needs sin to help it along, to buttress it, to back it, and give it success. One deception leads to another, and needs it, and each becomes a pledge of worse. Gehazi had to lie to Naaman; and it speaks of the power of greed and covetousness, to see this man telling the lie so plainly and confidently, misrepresenting his master, and dishonouring God's work as done by his master. All the food and fame of this grand world are not worth one little lie. Let us be careful not to want anything beyond the reach of honesty, nor to go where

we need lies and double-dealing for advancement. To be simple-minded, with Christ, is better than all the successes of duplicity. Gezahi's lie deceived a trusting man, and made the liar take still greater and more ungenerous advantage of Naaman's goodness, in doubling the amount of silver. The covetous liar has no room for generosity.

IV. *The success of the lie.* The falsehood has thriven; to deceive has been found to be the short road to wealth; to insult God, to defame his work, to misrepresent Elisha, and to plunder Naaman. These things have "paid," as men say. It is this kind of thing that is enough to shake a feeble faith, to see the wicked in great power. Gehazi had gotten his wealth, but what could he do with it? He hid it, hoarded it up for a few hours, and then the judgment came. He got his money like Achan, he hid it like Achan, and God troubled him as he troubled Achan. This is the life of those who are greedy of gain. It is like sowing the barren sea. We can only hoard earth's gain, or hide it away, or spend it on the world that passes away, for a few hours, and then God must come, and judgment must begin.—*C. W. P.*

One Man's Blessing Another Man's Curse (verses 25-27).

Gehazi has to face that from which a liar never escaped, and a false tongue never was delivered—even detection, exposure, shame, and everlasting contempt. The whole transaction had been decided on so quickly, and carried out so easily, that the probabilities were all in his favour, and warranted his hope that having gained his wealth by a bold stroke he would be able to keep it by effrontery. I. *Lying and false ways of earthly prosperity always leave out God.* Liars and deceivers ignore God's interest in their life, God's knowledge of their plans and schemes, and the execution of them. And in their apparently untroubled doing without God these men and their actions become most hurtful stumbling-blocks to many tender souls. Oh, guard in your daily actions against this perilous thought, this most hurtful habit of ignoring God, and his knowledge of your ways! Let us take the word of God as a "wholesome" blame to ourselves, and as a wise correction of many shameful things in our daily life. Let us really and solemnly believe in God's omnisicence, not as a theological article only, but as a matter for daily life and care; and let us try to cultivate the ever-present sense that God knows all our ways, and understands our hearts with their pitiful vileness. Yea, let not this beget terror and horror, like that of the prisoner in his cell, who, having been condemned to have some one day and night watching him through a hole in the prison door, became haunted and horrified by the eye that was ever looking at him; but, rather, let us gladly believe that "the Lord has searched us, and known us;" that He "understands our thoughts afar off;" and let us bare and open ourselves to the Infinite Searcher of hearts. II. They who will not do this, will have to prove the experience of Gehazi, that *one sin, one lie, makes others easier and worse.* Gehazi presumed that Elisha was ignorant of his doings, and when he went in and was asked, "Whence comest thou?" he had his answer ready, "Thy servant went nowhither." The lie came from him easily and readily, for he had prepared himself beforehand; and the lie he had told to Naaman trained him to insult, by deceiving, his master. The way to perdition is downhill, on a slippery way, with a descent that is ever quickening. The first step down gives us impetus, and every after step is easier to the soul that is going down away from the light. One act of lying or deceiving needs another, and begets its own kind until the liar deceives himself, imagining himself to be secure, when he is on the edge of perdition, and thinking his schemes are all doing well, when "He that sitteth in the heavens laughs at them, and the Lord has them in derision." In thus leading to a vile, false security of self-deception, lying becomes its own enemy and judgment. Though others may be hoodwinked, and conscience

may be blindfolded, so that right and wrong are not clearly discernible, yet deception must end somewhere. Somewhere, and with some one, a lie must be of no use, be wasted breath and ruinous sin. It is of no use with God; it stops at the throne of God; there it must stand revealed; and we have yet to see whether the boldness of earth's deceptions will be continued there. Who shall be bold in the day of God? Certainly not the false man. III. *Gehazi's exposure and shame* come now before us. How soon the scheme came to an end, and such an end! How soon the bubble burst! Gehazi had deceived Naaman and had gotten his money, but he had misled himself much more. For Elisha's spirit had been with him, and it is notable that Elisha says, that from the moment in which Gehazi began to deceive Naaman, he knew the whole. It is not a light thing to God when we allow ourselves to glide into an iniquity, but it must be and is before God a much viler thing when, in addition to wronging our own souls, we hurt and sin against others. Sin has been vile enough when, in cases that have come before our law courts, men have lied, and forged, and perjured themselves; the outrage on truth has been bad, but when widows and orphans and others have been ruined by trusting their money to such men, has there not risen a cry to God, a cry clamorous as that of Abel's unexpiated blood? Samuel Rutherford spoke tenderly yet terribly when he said, "I find it would be no art, as I see now, to make hypocrisy a goodly web, and to go through the market as a saint among men, and yet steal quietly to hell without observation, so easy it is to deceive men. Men see but as men, but to be approved of God (may I add in business?) is no ordinary mercy." Gehazi got Naaman's money; would that we all in our trading and toil had the spirit that would lay all gains before God, saying, Lord, whose money have I? IV. *Elisha's patriotism cried out against Gehazi's sin.* "Is it a time to receive money and garments and oliveyards, and vineyards and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?" This protest is based not only on Elisha's desire that Naaman's cure should be from beginning to end the evident work of the free grace and mercy of the God of Israel, but rises also from the condition of Israel as a nation at that time. It was a time of strife and care, of war and rumour of war, in which everyone ought to have been ready for the call of self-sacrifice, and for the encouragement of self-denying motives for the sake of the time and the fatherland. During all the period of war and siege and famine of which you may read in the next chapter, Elisha was the leader of the patriotic and no-surrender party in Samaria. He it was who encouraged the people to resist even to the uttermost; and even when the city was so reduced that women ate their own children, and the king sent a man to strike off Elisha's head as the leader of the resisting party, Elisha still kept the gates of the city shut against a surrender. Knowing the vigorous patriotism of this man of God, his readiness for self-devotion, we may well and easily understand Elisha's detestation of Gehazi's conduct when all that he seemed to wish for was the increase of his money and the accumulation of hoarded wealth. It was not a time to receive money, and pander by false ways to the lust for gain, though there are men who, in any crisis of a nation or society or religion, will put the claims of self-interest in the foreground, and judge only under the impulse of insatiable appetite for wealth. The patriot as well as the prophet speaks to us here, and his word declares that a man is required by the condition of his country and the state of the times in which he lives to forbid himself any gain, to deny himself any advance, that may involve him in meanness and sinfulness. With broader meaning also, out of which all other special applications come, we must learn from this that the Christian man is required to govern all his life by such a feeling as this of Elisha, that time on earth is to be passed in the actual subordination of earthly gains of money, or rich dress, or property, or social status. The present time is a time for *honest* toil and labour in the fear of God and the love of Jesus; but not for aiming at the miscalled

"goods" of this world. V. Now, coming to the last of this history, we see *Gehazi pierced through with many sorrows.* He had sought his good here, but with Naaman's money he got his leprosy too. The blessing of the Syrian became the curse of the servant of the man of God. Let us get this matter close to ourselves. The day of God, we may fear, will show many who have blighted themselves, marked themselves with a curse by their part in connection with God's word; many who have helped to do good, but therein doomed themselves by the spirit that they have allowed to grow on the work. It is not a light thing to assume leadership in the Lord, or eldership in His work, for if we are hurtful *in these things,* who shall heal the hurt?

> 'For what shall heal, when holy service banes?
> Or who may guide
> O'er desert plains
> Thy lov'd, yet sinful people wandering wide,
> If Aaron's hand, unshrinking, mould
> An idol form of earthly gold?"

What shall save when being an instrument of good is made its own curse by any soul? This doom of Gehazi is prophetic of all uncleansed sin and its miserable end. Any unrepented wrong against man or God must come back to the wrong-doer. Sin that we will not let Christ wash away must "find us out," for it is *our* sin, *our own* ghastly belonging for ever and ever. We are its author, owner, and home for ever. We raise a demon that we cannot lay but by taking it home to ourselves. Unpardoned—that is, unrepented—sin is as the unclean spirit of which the Lord spake: it has no end till it returns whence it set out. We began with honour and degradation in Naaman; and it all ends in this dishonour and degradation in Gehazi. "He went out a leper"—the curse of God had fallen on him by the word of the gentle master whose work he had defiled. Elisha's kindliness gave place to the word of vengeance. Oh, remember that there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb," and that when the gentleness of God, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, gives way to judgment, there shall be found no place for the liar, the covetous, or any impenitent. In the free grace and love by which Naaman was washed and purified we have our hope; and in the outraged love by which Gehazi was blighted we have our warning. Take both the hope and the warning.—C. W. P.

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 20-24. A sordid spirit. I. Remains unchanged, though in daily intercourse with the most unselfish nobleness. II. Cannot appreciate the motive that relinquishes a single opportunity of getting gain. III. Deludes itself in assuming a religious guise for its basest acts (verse 20). IV. Displays unseemly haste in getting possession of coveted treasure (verse 21). V. Is facile in manufacturing falsehood (verse 22). VI. Does not scruple to take every advantage of the generosity of others (verse 23). VII. Is careful to conceal the extent of its hoardings (verse 24).

Verse 20. How mighty are the evil inborn lusts of the human heart! Even in the case of those who have for years enjoyed the society of the noblest and most pious men, who have heard and read the Word of God daily, and who have had the example of holy conduct daily before their eyes, lusts arise, take possession of them, and carry them captive (James i. 13-15).

Verse 23. He who himself thinketh no evil, and is sincere, does not suspect cunning and deceit in others. Good-hearted, noble men, to whom it is more blessed to give than to receive,

are easily deceived, and they follow the inclination of their hearts instead of examining carefully to whom they are giving their benefactions.

Verse 24. That which we must conceal brings no blessing.

Verses 25-27. The audacity of a liar. I. Stands unabashed in the holiest presence. II. Under the necessity of adding lie to lie. III. Unexpectedly exposed. IV. Does not escape signal punishment.

Verse 25 compared with verse 27. "But he went in and stood before his master. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." A never-to-be-forgotten interview. I. He went in guilty, yet little dreaming of detection; he came out baffled, exposed, humbled. II. He went in hardened, impenitent, and prepared with excuses; he came out smitten with a punishment as little expected as it was terrible. III. A single interview may wither the happiness of a lifetime; judgment, though unanticipated, is swift and sure. IV. The way in which we shall come out of the last judgment will depend upon the character with which we go in.

Verse 26. It is folly to presume upon sin in hopes of secrecy. When thou goest aside into any bye-path, does not thy own conscience go with thee? Does not the eye of God go with thee?

— Giving is kind, and taking is courteous, and both may at times and in some cases be done without sin. There is much use of godly discretion, doubtless, in directing us when to open, when to shut our hands.—*Trapp.*

Verse 27. It is a woful exchange that Gehazi hath made with Naaman; Naaman came a leper, returned a disciple. Gehazi came a disciple, returned a leper. Naaman left behind both his disease and his money; Gehazi takes up both his money and his disease. Now shall Gehazi neverlook upon himself but he shall think of Naaman, whose skin is transferred upon him with those talents, and shall wear out the rest of his days in shame, in pain, and sorrow. His tears may wash off the guilt of his sin, but shall not, like another Jordan, wash off his leprosy; that shall ever remain as a hereditary monument of Divine severity. Happy was it for him if, while his skin was snow white with leprosy, his humbled soul was washed white as snow with the water of true repentance.—*Bp. Hall.*

— The leprosy of riches. Gold is tainted. Strength required to use it aright. A curse cleaves to it when it is ill-gotten or ill-used. This curse crops out most frequently in the children. A father absorbed in the pursuit of wealth, and mother absorbed in fashion, will bring up corrupt and neglected children. Parents who love gold, fashion, and display, train their children to hold these the chief things in life.

— As Naaman was a living monument of the saving might and grace of Jehovah, so Gehazi was a monument of the retributive justice of the Holy One in Israel; a living warning and threat for the entire people. By his conversion Naaman was taken up into God's community of redemption in Israel; by his unfaithfulness and denial of this God, Gehazi brings down upon himself the punishment which excludes him from the society of the prophet-disciples and of the entire covenant people. As Naaman's cure and conversion was a physical prophecy that God will have pity upon the heathen also, and will receive him into His covenant of grace, so Gehazi's leprosy prophesied the rejection of the people of Israel who should abandon the covenant of grace and persevere in apostasy (Matt. viii. 11, 12; xxi. 43). —*Lange.*

— Let not the punishment of Gehazi be thought too severe. Important principles were involved in his conduct, for it was a time when the representatives of the sacred office needed to observe the greatest caution against the spirit of worldliness. Gehazi's acts on this occasion were a complication of wickedness. He showed con-

tempt for the judgment of his master in the matter of receiving gifts; he meanly misrepresented the prophet by making him ask for what Naaman had just heard him most positively refuse; he invented a false story to blind the eyes of Naaman; and, finally, told a miserable lie in the hope of escaping detection from Elisha. Add to all this the foul spirit of covetousness that actuated him through all this evil course, and his curse will not appear too great. The extending of his curse to his children after him is but another exhibition of the terrible consequences of human sinfulness. Gehazi's posterity, innocent of their father's sins, but, like many others, they were compelled to bear the consequences of ancestral crimes. That thousands of innocents are subjected to suffering because of the sins of others is a fact which none can deny. Why this is permitted under the government of an all-wise God is a question which He has not seen fit fully to answer.—*Whedon.*

CHAPTER VI.

ELISHA AND THE SYRIAN INVASION.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 2. **Take thence every man a beam**—The wooded banks of the Jordan would furnish timber readily; probably Bethel or Jericho. Although, evidently, the students of Elisha were of a humble character, and he offered them but few indulgences and delicacies, yet their number grew so as to need a larger home, or a more commodious lecture-hall. Verses 8, 9. *In such a place* **shall** be my camp. *i.e.*, *shall ye hide yourselves*—Probably the word here is from the same root as in verse 9, where it is rendered, *For thither the Syrians* **are come down**, *i.e.*, there the Syrians *hide themselves;* or the two words may have as their roots respectively חָנָה and נָחַת; but the word in verse 8 occurs only there in that form throughout the Bible. Verse 12. **Elisha . . telleth . . the words thou speakest in thy bedchamber**—Elisha apprised king Jehoram of the designs of the Syrian king, who thereby was enabled to anticipate and defeat his guerilla attacks. Verse 13. **Behold he is in Dothan**—In a narrow pass through mountains, on the caravan road from Gilead to Egypt, twelve miles north of Samaria, in the Esdraelon plain. Verse 17. **The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire**—For in this case, and in contrast with the mere "horses and chariots" (verse 15) of the Syrian army, this was a *fiery host*, אֵשׁ, denoting their supernatural and divine origin, for it is the symbol of Deity. Verse 19. **I will bring you to the man whom ye seek**—This was an evasion for a good purpose, and not an untruth, for Elisha did bring them to him, vanquished and grateful; in the sense of having won them to him, capturing them in the meshes of kindness, instead of their capturing him in hatred and vengeance. Verse 25. **A great famine in Samaria**—The high prices of revolting articles of food is given to show the extremes of distress to which the people were driven. **An ass's head**—Regarded as unclean food, yet sold for £5 5s. **A cab of doves' dung**—A *cab* was the smallest Hebrew dry measure, about half-pint, and its price was 12s. 6d. *Doves' dung* is probably the name for a kind of pea or seed, which was contemptuously so called. Josephus, however, relates that in the seige of Jerusalem by Titus, the sewage even of the city was drained, and the excrements eaten! Verse 27. **If the Lord do not help thee**—Rather, *Nay! Jehovah help thee!* Verse 29. **So we boiled my son**—Misery had culminated in so abhorrent a deed! The other woman had hid her son, not to consume it, but to shield it from such a fate. Verse 30. **Sackcloth within upon his flesh**—Visible under his torn outer garments he wears the penitential robe of sackcloth. But in his case it showed no humiliation of spirit before God; it was but as the phylacteries of the Pharisees. His imprecation on Elisha shows his evil disposition to be unsubdued. He blamed not himself, but the prophet, as Ahab did Elijah (1 Kings xviii. 17). Verse 32. **Son of a murderer**—By descent, the son of Ahab; and in disposition like him (1 Kings xxi. 19). **Hold him fast at the door**—*Keep him off with the door, i.e.*, by pressing against it. **Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?**—*i.e.*, of the king's feet, who would impetuously follow on the heels of his messenger. Elisha urges the elders not to let the king's executioners enter at once, but detain him till the king himself arrives. Verse 33. **The messenger came down**—For "messenger," Ewald and Grätz read

"*king*," and the sense requires this. Doubtless he would be admitted to the prophet's presence; and as he meets Elisha he utters a cry full of despair, in which he confesses that the Lord's hand is against him, and that he sees now no hope of deliverance from the prevailing distress; yet in his cry of despair there is a tremulous suggestion of possible help from the Lord he had incensed.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-7.

THE DIVINE SYMPATHY FOR LITTLE SORROWS.

The miracle recorded in this paragraph presents a striking contrast to that which was wrought on behalf of Naaman. In the case of the great Syrian captain his cure was a public display of Divine power and mercy, and served to extol the God of Israel among the nations. It was a great work, wrought upon a great personage, and would become the talk and marvel of a great and populous nation. The miracle we are now considering was of a humbler character, and taught a different lesson. An obscure and nameless prophet of Jericho is the subject of Divine compassion, and the Divine power is put forth in connection with the humblest and most insignificant affairs of human life and toil. The omnipotence which startles a world with its wonders is also available, in the most modest and unobtrusive form, for the relief of genuine distress. Of this class of Elisha's wonderful works, this is the last one recorded, and makes a fitting complement to his other miracles of blessing. The healing of the waters of Jericho, the increase of the widow's oil, the raising of the Shunammite's son, the healing of the poisoned pottage, the multiplying of the loaves, and the healing of Naaman, all had more direct reference to the wants of families or societies, and did not so much enter into the particular anguish of one single heart as did this. This relieving of a comparatively little loss and that of a single individual, give assurance that Divine providence will work for the comfort of one suffering heart as well as for the interests of societies or families; and shows that sorrows which we may think of little moment receive great attention from Him who numbers the hairs of our head. It presents a touching and suggestive picture of *the Divine sympathy for little sorrows*. Note—

I. That the Divine sympathy is interested in the temporal comfort of the good (verse 1-4). The school of the prophets had outgrown its accommodation, and Elisha was consulted as to a more commodious dwelling. The disciples, not content with simply gaining the consent of their revered teacher to the undertaking, prevailed upon him to accompany them. Elisha represented the Divine interest and intention in the work. God is not indifferent to the temporal welfare and happiness of His people. He looks down sympathizingly on a good man, struggling with straitened circumstances, or upon a church making efforts for extension in the midst of poverty and persecution. He ensures the comfort of the good irrespective of external surroundings. Riches and poverty are more in the heart than in the hand; he is wealthy who is contented, while the disconted millionnaire is poor indeed. The Lord bestows upon His people the unpurchasable blessing of contentment which fills up all the chinks of desire as the molten metal fills up the minutest cavity in the mould.

II. That the Divine sympathy does not overlook the individual in the many (verse 5). There was a number of workers in the forest, all engaged in

the same occupation—felling timber for the house of the prophets; but there was one only of the number who specially arrested the Divine notice, and called forth the Divine power, and he was unfortunate and distressed. Man often loses sight of the individual in the multitude, but Jehovah never. It is easy for us to sympathize with a nation, and shed tears over its sufferings and sorrows, while we have no particular interest in any one member of the nation. Jehovah cares for the whole human race, by caring for every individual member of it. And if there is one who more quickly than another attracts the Divine sympathy, it is the unfortunate and suffering. The tramp and bustle of the crowd could not deafen the ear of Jesus to the cry of blind Bartimeus. The unseen touch by trembling, but believing fingers, of the fringe of his robe, awoke a sympathetic response in the Saviour's heart, and the sufferer for years was in a moment healed. Amid the thousands of war-like Syrians who surrounded the city of Dothan (verse 14), the Lord did not forget the solitary Elisha, but provided for his rescue and safety. It is with significant emphasis the psalmist declares a truth which is being constantly exemplified: "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Psa. xxxiv. 6).

III. That the Divine sympathy does not hesitate to exert miraculous power to alleviate what may seem the little sorrows of life (verses 6, 7). It might appear a trifling matter to lose the iron head of an axe, but to this poor prophet it was a real and serious loss. It was not only that he was prevented taking his share in helping his fellow-workers, but it was the loss of borrowed property which he had no possible means of replacing. This to a conscientious mind would be torture enough, and would exalt what might seem a small trouble into a great one. But with our God these are no little things. What we regard as the little cares and sorrows of the poor may have a magnitude in God's eye as great as the cares of empire and the afflictions of princes. The loss of the axe was to the hapless borrower a calamity greater than would have been to Naaman the loss of all the treasures he had brought from Damascus. The sorrow was not too insignificant to evoke the Divine sympathy, and the exertion, through the prophet Elisha, of miraculous power for its assuagement. The greatness of God appears in the minute attention and finish that he gives to little things. The tiniest flower, the smoothly-rounded pebble, the geometrically-shaped snowflake, the delicately-tinted ocean-shell, each bears witness to the infinite care and artistic touch of the Divine hand. The smallest troubles of humanity are not unnoticed. The tear quickly dashed away, the half-suppressed sigh, the silent hidden anguish of the heart, bring down the helping arm of God to the soul that appeals to Him—the arm which is as gentle in its soothing ministrations as it is mighty in its terrible vengeance.

LESSONS:—1. *There is nothing too insignificant for the Divine notice.* 2. *What may seem little sorrows to others are great enough to the sufferer.* 3. *We should carry every trouble, however minute, to God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-7. The prosperity of the Church. 1. Advances, notwithstanding abounding wickedness and persecution. 2. Often results from the earnestness and diligence of one good man. 3. Demands harmonious co-operation among all Christian workers. 4. Receives the divine sanction and blessing.

Verse 1. There was no loss of Gehazi; when he was gone the prophets increased. An ill man in the Church is but like some shrubby tree in a garden, whose shape keeps better plants from growing. The kings of Israel had succeeded in idolatry and hate of sincere religion, yet the prophets multiply. Persecution enlarges the bounds of the Church. These tempestuous showers bring up flowers in abundance. The Church, like the palm tree, the more it is pressed with weight, the more it fructifies; like camomile, it flourishes when most trodden; like the lily, it grows by its own tears.

Verses 5-7. The borrowed axe. I. *The loan.* 1. Kindly lent to men in need; probably with many promises on the one side, and many injunctions on the other. 2. A very valuable loan at that time. Manufacture of metals imperfectly understood then; manufactured articles were, therefore, more expensive, and more difficult to obtain. 3. A willingness to lend shows a kind heart; sympathy with the object and purposes of the borrower should not, therefore, be abused. A willingness to lend, but never to borrow, which is the proud boast of some, is a pitiful spirit. Sometimes to give one the opportunity of lending, is to do him good by exercising his benevolence and goodwill. II. *The loss.* 1. Accidental. Not altogether void of thoughtlessness. Should have taken care that the head was more firmly united to the haft, or that the blow was delivered in another direction. 2. Serious. Could not be easily replaced. Axe heads scarce and expensive, and the borrower poor; but the most serious part of the loss was the moral effect of it. The non-return of loans makes lenders chary of assisting those who need such help. People who are remiss in returning, in due time and undamaged, borrowed property, little think what injury they do to benevolent and neighbourly feeling, or what damage they inflict upon others. III. *The recovery.* 1. He who had lost it did not treat the matter as of no importance. His concern a good sign. Would there were more of it in the world. 2. He noticed where it fell, looked anxiously at the water, probably sounded it, found it deep and turbid. Could not find or recover it. He went in dismay to the prophet. 3. Elisha comprehended the situation at once. The axe must be recovered for monetary, and, above all, moral reasons. He was not the man to work miracles on every pretext. This was no slight matter; no one should have reason to regret he had aided, even by a loan, in the building of the prophets' college. Confidence in the prophets should not be damaged by the loss of the axe. LEARN:—1. *To be conscientious in the matter of borrowing and lending.* 2. *To be more anxious concerning the safety of borrowed articles than even of our own.—The Class and Desk.*

Verse 5. Genuine honesty. 1 An evidence of true religion. 2. Is found among the poorest. 3. Is scrupulous in caring for and returning that which is borrowed. 4. Is deeply distressed in losing what belongs to another. 5. Will use all possible means to restore what is lost.

Verse 6. O God! how easy it is for thee, when this hard and heavy heart of mine is sunk down into the mud of the world, to fetch it up again by thy mighty word, and cause it to float upon the streams of life, and to see the face of heaven again.—*Bishop Hall.*

Verse 7. God's might and goodness are revealed in the smallest detail, as well as in the greatest combination. He helps in what are, apparently, the smallest interests of the individual, as well as in the greatest affairs of entire nations; and He rules with His grace especially over those who keep His covenant, and turn to Him in all the necessities of life. That is the great truth which this little story proclaims,

and, just for the sake of this truth, it was thought worthy to be inserted in the history of the theocracy. The restoration of the axe, whereby aid was given to the prophet-disciple in his need, strengthened all the others in the faith that the God in whose honour they were erecting the building was with them, and would accompany their work with his blessing. They worked now the more zealously and gladly.—*Lange.*

— It often happens that the Lord takes from us some possession, or appears to do so, only with the purpose of returning it after a longer or shorter time in some unexpected way, that it may thus come to us as a gift of Divine love, and a pledge of His grace.—*Krummacher.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 8-17.

The Triumphs of Prayer.

We have seen the power of Elisha in the working of miracles in the realm of private life, and, for the most part, on behalf of the individual. Now we are to witness the beneficent power of the prophet as it operates in the wider sphere of public and national life. He appears as the seer, the man of supernatural insight, the prophet who is in habitual and prayerful communion with God, the adviser and friend of a perplexed sovereign and a harassed nation. In him is a combination of great gentleness with great power. The character in which the history now reveals him, as a man of prayer, may explain the source of his enormous power, and the vast range of his influence. The incidents here described illustrate *the triumphs of prayer.*

I. Seen in giving extraordinary insight into the plottings of the enemy (verses 8-12). Elisha had power to read the secret counsels of the invading Syrian, and thus enabled the king of Israel to disconcert the plans of Benhadad, and to escape his ambuscades. Prayer intensifies the sensibilities of the soul, and makes it more keenly alive to the movements of the wicked one; it can see sights and hear sounds unperceived by others. After Elijah had wrestled with God in prayer, on Mount Carmel, he heard "a sound of abundance of rain," though others heard it not. The sky was cloudless and hard as steel, the earth seamed and cracked, vegetation withered, the cattle were perishing, and the gaunt figure of famine, which had been tightening its grasp upon the land for two years and a half, was as pitiless and inflexible as ever. The soul that is quick to perceive coming good, is also quick to detect coming evil. The man of prayer is more than a match for the subtlest adversary.

2. Seen in inspiring a fearless courage in the midst of threatened danger (verses 13-16). The glittering spears and chariots surrounding the city, which filled the servant of Elisha with so much alarm, struck no fear in the breast of his undaunted master. With what unutterable confidence he whispers those reassuring words: "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." The praying spirit is ever brave and strong in great emergencies. It was prayer that sustained Moses when at Rephidim he was surrounded by the mutinous host clamouring for water, and threatening to stone him to death (Exodus xvii. 1-4). Before Luther went to the Diet of Worms, where he expected the worst, and before Knox was tried for high treason, which threatened his own life and the ruin of the Reformation movement in Scotland, they both found relief in prayer. When a steamer went down in the Bay of Biscay a short time ago, what enabled the minister and his wife to speak with such calmness and hope to their fellow-passengers

and the crew assembled in the already flooded cabin, when they expected the next lurch of the vessel would be the last? It was prayer. The solitary praying prophet felt far more confidence and courage than did Benhadad with all his warlike hosts.

III. Seen in giving the soul sublime visions of the nearness and all-sufficiency of heavenly help (verse 17). The horses and chariots of fire were there before; but they were not seen by the young man, though they were seen by Elisha. Both had the ordinary common sense by which external objects are apprehended; but in Elisha's case there was superadded the God-given sense of supernatural vision. Our common sense, however sound and accurate, is limited in its scope. When the comet of 1858 appeared, an observer declared that its luminous tail was just four feet long, while to the educated scientific sense it was known to extend for millions of miles. So the glories of the heavenly firmament are diminished or altogether hidden to the ordinary sense, and are revealed only to the eye of faith. Prayer intensifies the spiritual vision, and the soul beholds around it the shining hosts of heavenly ministrants ready to do the bidding of the all-powerful Jehovah.

IV. Seen in giving power to baffle and defeat the foe (verses 18-20). Through the prayer of Elisha the Syrian host is smitten with blindness, so that they could not recognise him, nor the way in which he led them. What was their astonishment when, the blindness being removed at the instance of the man of prayer, they beheld themselves in the midst of Samaria, at the mercy of the soldiers of Jehoram. The soul has to contend with enemies, fierce and formidable. When Napoleon at Waterloo watched the tremendous charge of the Scots Greys, and witnessed the havoc wrought among the French columns, he exclaimed "How terrible are these Greys!" But more terrible still are the enemies with which we have to fight. Prayer only can give the skill and power to conquer. Gideon prayed, and though his army was reduced from 32,000 to 300, he inflicted upon the Midianites a most disastrous defeat (Judges vi. vii). Samson prayed, and with restored strength he pulled down the Philistian temple, and destroyed more of his own and the Lord's enemies in his death than he had done in his lifetime.

V. Seen in treating a conquered and distressed enemy with clemency and kindness (verses 20-23). The king of Israel, seeing the Syrians thus brought into his power, was anxious at once to despatch them. Perhaps he remembered Ahab's great mistake in not slaying the Syrian king when in his power, and for which mistake he was sternly rebuked by one of the prophets (1 Kings xx. 35-43). But the man of prayer interposed between the fury of the king and his captives; instead of being slaughtered, they were hospitably entertained and then released, refreshed and unscathed. There are enemies of the soul to whom no mercy should be shown; no opportunity to crush them should be missed. There are enemies, again, who, when their wrong is exposed and acknowledged, we may generously forgive. Prayer fills the soul with sympathy and mercy, and expands it with magnanimity. Abraham prayed for Abimelech, and he and his house were healed. Moses prayed, and Miriam, who was punished because she had joined in the sedition against her brother, was cured of her leprosy.

VI. Seen in giving rest and security to a harrassed nation. "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel" (verse 23). The prayers and wisdom of one man relieved the troubles of the court and of the people. The nation is often unspeakably indebted to the prayers of a faithful few. Hezekiah

prayed when Rabshekah thundered at the gates of Jerusalem, and the Assyrians were smitten with death (ch. xix. 14-36). Ezra's prayer led to national reform and prosperity (Ez. ix. x). More solid good is wrought in a nation by prayer than by diplomacy or arms.

LESSONS:—1. *Prayer is essential to building up a great and influential moral character.* 2. *Prayer intensifies the perceptive and realizing power of faith.* 3. *Prayer is an all-potent agency in conquering spiritual adversaries.*

THE VISION PERMITTED TO ELISHA'S SERVANT AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE TRUE FAITH OF THE SOUL (verse 17).

The chariots and horses are not here, as in the account of the ascent of Elijah a few chapters before, vehicles for a glorious passage to the skies, but simply symbols of the Divine power and protection; but in both passages the highest intelligences are represented as taking shapes, like the forms in Ezekiel, which imply that their true nobility is always service. The immaterial spirits become cognizable by the servant of Elisha under forms best calculated to reassure his fainting faith. Fire is a symbol of the Godhead, because fire is the most ethereal of the earthly elements. The gift of Pentecost sat as tongues of fire on the heads of the apostles. God is said by His prophet and His apostle to be "a consuming fire." "The seraph is properly the burning spirit." The horses and chariots mean, therefore, warlike force. Still, what the servant sees is not a material, it is a spiritual reality, taking a form which assures him of God's sure protection, through the agencies of these ministers of His who do His pleasure, and at a time when all was death to the eye of flesh.

I. Now, here we see, as if through a microscope, the act or process of faith in the human soul. Faith, first of all, is not an act of the natural imagination. It is necessary to say this, because a great many persons constantly allude to faith in terms which imply that it is. They speak of a person of great faith, meaning that he is a very imaginative person, that he has quite an unusual share of that privileged, that versatile faculty which does indeed achieve so much in society, so much for literature, which is the very well-spring of poetry, which is the soul, the genius of constructive art, but which is less welcome in the sphere of religious truth, because its highest efforts result in surrounding us with the unreal, while investing it with the attributes of reality. When men speak of faith as a vivid and energetic form of imagination, they mean to imply this, without stating in terms that they do so; they mean to imply that just as the poet Virgil projected a picture of the nether world out of the immense wealth of his fancy, so evangelists and apostles have traced their own beautiful pictures of heaven, and their awful descriptions of hell and of judgment, on the pages of our testaments, by the aid of an extraordinary variety of the religious imagination. The evangelists and apostles, whatever else they were—I say it with reverence—were not poets, they were eminently prosaic; and the remarks of Rousseau that the inventor of the gospel history must have been not less wonderful than its hero if he were entirely unassisted from above, is at least a satisfactory reply to this theory of faith doing the work of pure imagination. In the case before us Elisha's servant did not create, by an act of imagination, a splendid picture in the air, after the manner of a Milton or a Rubens, a picture of fiery beings circling round the form of his beloved, of his imperilled master. The thing is psychologically impossible. He had his eye upon the hard and menacing fact

before him, upon the lines of the Syrian troops who were sent to capture the prophet his master. He could, for the time, see nothing beyond the sphere of sense. His new power of seeing the chariots and horses of fire sweeping around Elisha did not create these spiritual forms and beings; there they were, whether he and other men saw them or not, just as the more remote planets were certainly revolving in their orbits during the centuries when our science had not yet reached them by her reckonings and telescopes. Elisha had been just as much encompassed by the spirit-world the moment before his servant saw that this was the case, as he was the moment afterwards. The man's new sight could not create, as his blindness could not have destroyed, the supernatural reality.

II. Nor is faith only the conclusion, the final act, of a process of natural reasoning. If this were the case, if faith were merely the conclusion of a syllogism, it would necessarily follow that all people with good understandings must necessarily be believers in Christianity. We know, my brethren, that this is not the case. We know, alas! that many persons of great natural abilities, such as was Voltaire, are and have been unbelievers; and this alone would seem to show that something besides intelligence is implied in an act of faith. No man whose mind was not impaired could go through a proposition of Euclid and refuse to assent to a conclusion; but many people do read "Paley's Evidences," or, what is more to the purpose, what St. Paul himself says about the resurrection, and yet do not admit Paley's and St. Paul's conclusion that Christianity comes from God. If believing in Christianity were simply an affair of the natural understanding, this could not be. It would be just as inevitable to believe St. Paul as it is intellectually to believe Euclid. The affections and the will have a great deal to say to every pure act of faith. The understanding cannot compel faith. The evidence at the disposal of the understanding is always less than absolutely mathematical; it does not convince unless the moral nature is in such a condition that it is possible for it to be convincing. What is it which makes the desire, the heart on the one side, and the evidence at the disposal of the understanding on the other side, result in the complex, in the perfect act of faith? What is it which strikes the sacred spark which thus combines the action of the understanding and the yearnings of the heart into the single act which supersedes while it combines them?

III. Faith is, in the last resort, the fire which is lighted up in the soul by a ray from Heaven, by a ray of grace. It is a gift from God. It is a fresh gift, which nature can neither rival nor anticipate. Elisha might have insisted upon many considerations which ought in reason to have satisfied his servant that God and His holy ones were now, as of old, near at hand, that the near presence of the Syrians did not amount to a real reason of despair. Elisha did not argue. There are times when it is worse than useless. Elisha prayed; he prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of the young man to see things, not as they appear to sense, but as they are; to see, not merely the world of sense, but the world of spirit; and his prayer was granted. Reason can do very much for faith. Reason stands to faith just as did the Baptist to Christ our Lord. She is the messenger which goes before the face of faith to make ready its path within the soul. Reason can explain, she can infer, she can combine, she can reduce difficulties to their true proportions, she can make the most of considerations which show what, upon the whole, is to be expected; but here she must stop. She cannot do the work of God's grace; she cannot transfigure the moral nature so as to enable it to correspond to the conclusions of the illuminated intellect; she cannot open the eyes of the young man and make him see. If this last triumph is to be achieved, it must be by grace given in answer to prayer.

IV. Let us see in this history a remedy against despondency, such as good Christians often feel on contemplating the state of the world at particular periods. All seems to be going against the cause of right, of truth, of God. Intellectual assailants, political adversaries, all the passions, all the prejudices, all the misapprehensions of an unregenerate humanity come down and besiege the prophet in Dothan. All might seem to be lost again and again, if it were not that again and again the eyes of the spirit are opened to perceive that they which are with as are more than they which are with them. Courage; the unseen is greater than the seen, the eternal will surely outlive the things of time. An act of faith may cross the threshold of the door which separates us from that world which is beyond the senses, and may at once correct the apparent preponderance of evil by a vision of the throne, and the resources of the All-good.

V. And see, too, in this history, our true pattern of nobility. It has been a common saying, quoted again and again of late, to explain and justify changes on the Continent that have taken place within the last ten years, that it is better to be the citizens of a great state than the citizens of a small one. It is better for many reasons; for this among the rest, there is an inspiration for good, which comes from the sense of wide and noble fellowship, of high and distinguished associates and guardians, which is denied to those who are members of a small society that have it not. And in His kingdom God has provided us with this. All the races of the world furnish their contributions to the universal church. But the frontier of sense is not the frontier of the church of Christ. It embraces both worlds, the unseen world as well as the visible. The church is a mixed as well as a world-embracing society, consisting, here of the faithful, there of the blessed angels and of the spirits of the dead, united in the bonds of one indissoluble communion, and all ranged beneath the throne of thrones, the throne of God, the throne of Jesus. The Syrian host may press us hard; the host of temptations and bad thoughts and bad acquaintances; of haunting memories; but when, at the voice of prayer, our eyes open upon the realities around and above us, we must remember that we have a destiny before us, and means at hand to prepare for it.

VI. Lastly, we see here the secret of real effective prayer. Why is prayer, public prayer especially, in so many cases nothing better than the coldest of cold, heartless forms? For two reasons especially. They enter on it without having any true knowledge of themselves whatever; of their sins and wants, as well as of their hopes and fears; of their real state before God, as well as of their reputed character in the eyes of men; in a word, they have no true knowledge of that for which prayer wins something like a remedy, and thus they have no personal interest of their own which they can import into and identify with the public language of the Church. This is the first reason. But there is a second. Prayer is so cold and heartless a thing in numbers of instances, because men see nothing of Him to whom prayer is addressed, nothing of God, nothing of Jesus, nothing of the spirit-world around the throne, nothing of the majesty, the beauty, the glory which encircles God, such as is possible, really possible, to our finite and purblind gaze—nothing of the everlasting worship which surrounds Him, nothing of the ministers of His that do His pleasure. There are, believe it, few better prayers on entering a church than Elisha's, "Lord, open mine eyes, that I may see." "I do not wish to mock Thee by lip service, I do not wish to pile up my ordinary business thoughts, or my thoughts of pleasure, on the very steps of Thy throne; open mine eyes, then, that I may see in Thy beauty, and in Thy glorious presence may lose all relish which belongs only to the things of time." It is when the soul

struggles thus in an honest spiritual agony that it is really emancipated from the tyranny of sense, and, like the young man in this history, or rather like the dying martyr of the gospel times, see the heavens opened, sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God.—*Canon Liddon*, condensed from *Hom. Quarterly*.

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 8-17. **Hints of the course of things in Zion.** 1. The revealed plot. 2. The military expedition against one man. 3. The peaceful abode. 4. The cry of alarm. 5. The unveiled protection from above.—*Krummacher*.

Verses 8-12. **The mischief maker.** 1. Consults with kindred spirits who are most likely to carry out his designs. 2. Delights in plotting evil against the weak and inoffensive. 3. Fondly dreams his schemes are too cunningly devised for discovery. 4. Is intensely mortified when his plans prove abortive. 5. Is first to suspect his accomplices of treachery. 6. Cannot tolerate a superior.

Verse 9. It is no treason to bring crafty and malicious plots to the light. It is a sacred duty (Acts xxiii. 16). Beware of going into places where thou wilt be in jeopardy of soul and body. Be on thy guard when the enemy advances.—*Osiander*.

Verse 11. When God brings to naught the plots of the crafty, they become enraged, and, instead of recognizing the hand of God and humbling themselves, they lay the blame upon other men, and become more malicious and obstinate. He who does not understand the ways of God thinks that he sees human treason in what is really God's dispensation. Woe to the ruler who cannot trust his nearest attendants.—*Starke*.

Verse 12. **God-given wisdom.** 1. Bestowed on men eminent for prayer and obedience. 2. Enables man to discern the unsuspected secrets of others. 3. Is more than a match for the most consummate subtlety of the wicked. 4. Should be used in warning and delivering the innocent.

— Tremble with fear, ye obstinate sinners, because all is bared and discovered before His eyes, and shudder at the thought that the veil behind which ye carry on your works does not exist for Him! All which ye plot in your secret corners to-day, ye will find to-morrow inscribed upon His book; and however secretly and cunningly ye spin your web, not a single thread of it shall escape His eye!—*Krumm*.

Verses 13-16. **Moral courage.** 1. Is gained by communion with God. 2. Is a tower of strength to man in whatever locality he may dwell. 3. Is not intimidated by the most formidable host. 4. Inspires confidence in the timid and fearful. 5. Is conscious of being backed by superior force.

Verse 17. **The vision of the supernatural.** 1. Hidden from the most highly educated natural powers. 2. Granted by a special operation of the Divine Spirit on the human mind. 3. A dazzling revelation of heavenly power and beauty. 4. Inspires invincible bravery in times of peril.

— In answer to Elisha's prayer, God opened his spiritual eyes, unveiled his inner sense, and lifted him for a moment to the high plane of Elisha's supernatural vision, whence he obtained a view of the mighty creations of the spiritual world around him. This sight into the spiritual world was not an instance of hallucination, but a miracle of grace; an instance of that Divine ecstacy or trance in which the holy seers were enabled to behold the visions of the supersensual world, and which consists essentially in this, that the human spirit is seized and compassed by the

Divine spirit with such force and energy, that, being lifted from its natural state, it becomes altogether a seeing eye, a hearing ear, a perceiving sense, that takes most vivid cognizance of things in either heaven, earth, or hell.—*Whedon.*

— Invisible armies guard the servants of God while they seem most forsaken of earthly aid, most exposed to certain dangers. If the eyes of our faith be as open as those of our sense, to see angels as well as Syrians, we cannot be appalled with the most unequal terms of hostility. Those blessed spirits are ready either to rescue our bodies, or to carry up our souls to blessedness.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 18-23. The Divine treatment of sin. 1. Sin blinds the soul so that it does not justly apprehend the true character of what it sees. 2. Sin causes the soul to wander in darkness and error. 3. The wicked are always eager to take advantage of the mistakes of their opponents. 4. God spares the sinner, though he is completely in His power. 5. Divine mercy has made every provision for the present and future welfare of the sinner. 6. The Divine clemency should disarm hostility, and promote amity and peace among men.

Verse 18. The Lord smites with blindness those who fight against Him, not in order that they may remain blind, but in order that they may truly see, after they shall have observed how far they have strayed, and shall have recognized the error of their way.

Verse 23. The king of Israel has done by his feast what he could not have done by his sword. The bands of Syria will no more come by way of ambush or incursion into the bounds of Israel. Never did a charitable act go away without the retribution of a blessing. In doing some good to our enemies, we do most good to ourselves. God cannot but love in us this imitation of His mercy, who bids His sun shine, and His rain fall, where He is most provoked; and that love is never fruitless.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 24-33.

The Horrors of Famine.

I. Famine is the dread companion of war (verses 24, 25). Benhadad soon forgot the clemency with which his soldiers were treated when in the power of the king of Israel (verses 21-23). Perhaps he was chagrined with the failure of his previous attempts with detached bands of warriors, and determined to invade Israel with a vast army. The Syrians poured into the ill-fated country in overwhelming numbers, and so thoroughly invested Samaria, that in a short time the city was reduced to a state of abject famine. The horrors of war and of famine are always in ghastly association.

> "Loud the shrieks of battle roar,
> Streaming down the hollow wind;
> War and slaughter go before,
> Want and death are left behind."

When David had a choice of three punishments for his sin in numbering the people—famine, war, or pestilence—he was in a strait which to select, and in his bewilderment threw himself upon the mercy of God (2 Sam. xxiv. 14) The four lepers who brought the intelligence of the flight of the Syrians evidently concluded there was nothing to choose between famine and the sword (chapter vii. 4). The pathway of war is streaked with blood, and strewn with

the bones of the famished. In the extremity of hunger the most nauseous articles are seized for food. The history of besieged cities reveals the loathsome dishes on which the most delicate were compelled to dine.

II. That famine blunts and demoralises the tenderest feelings of human nature (verses 26-29). A mother's love for her offspring is the strongest passion in the human heart. It is the last foul stroke of famine when this love is shattered; when all delicacy and refinement, all sense of right and wrong, all fond endearment and deep-seated love are so thoroughly extinguished that a mother can share a meal with a neighbour on the boiled body of her own child, then the horrors of famine have reached their climax! And yet this was among the woes that Moses foretold would come to pass with this people in case of disobedience (Deut. xxviii. 53). Kitto furnishes a number of particulars concerning a terrible famine in Egypt, in the year 1200, when the people, after resorting to the most unclean and abominable food in the extremity of their hunger, began to feed on young children; and it was not uncommon to surprise parties with children half boiled or roasted. At first this was treated by the authorities as a horrible crime; but by-and-bye the horror entirely subsided, and every one spoke of it, and heard it spoken of, as an indifferent and ordinary matter. It is very humbling to man to discover the overwhelming power of the lower passions in extremity. There seems but a brittle barrier between civilized man and the savage. The restraints of Divine grace, direct and indirect, are more potent upon society than the artificial laws imposed by "use and wont."

III. That famine is the source of great distress to the humane ruler (verse 30). The first duty of a king is to provide for the immediate physical needs of his subjects. This much is recognised among the wildest tribes. It is, therefore, a cause of unspeakable suffering to a considerate monarch when he is unable to supply his own and his people's wants. This was the condition of the king of Israel at this time. The barn-floor was swept, and the winepress empty. The staple articles of food were consumed, and king and people were involved in a common suffering. No wonder Jehoram wore the sackcloth of humiliation, and rent his clothes in despair. Kings have their troubles. Great honour means great responsibility. In famine, the king is as powerless as the beggar.

IV. That the innocent are often unjustly blamed and threatened as the cause of famine (verses 31, 32). There was evidently more sorrow in the king of Israel than repentance. He was not yet brought to see that all this suffering was in consequence of sin. He blames Elisha, and, in his despair and fury, determines to take away the prophet's life. And yet what had he done? If Elisha foretold and warned them of the famine, did not their sins deserve it? If the prophet might have averted the calamity by his prayer, did not their impenitence restrain him? If he advised the king to hold out the siege, did he not foresee the remarkable deliverance that was at hand, and that only by suffering would both king and people be prepared to acknowledge the hand of God? "All Israel did not afford a head so guiltless as this that was destined to slaughter. This is the fashion of the world; the lewd blame the innocent, and will revenge their sin upon others' uprightness." If the soul is innocent of the sins which the vileness of others attributes to it, it can afford to wait for the Divine vindication. The character of His servants is safe in the hands of God.

V. That famine is here acknowledged as a Divine judgment. "Behold, this evil is of the Lord" (verse 33). We are to suppose the king had, in reflection

repented of his rash command to murder Elisha, and immediately hurried after the messenger to stay the execution. He is convinced the famine is a Divine judgment on the nation for his sins. Having reached this state of mind, he enquires, in a spirit of more genuine repentance than he has before displayed. "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" He prays for a removal of the famine. "The passage may be thus paraphrased:—I acknowledge that this evil is a punishment for my sins; the Lord thus chastens me sorely; but now when all this people are brought to such an extremity of woe, why should I wait longer for the Lord to interpose and deliver this people from their sufferings?" It is hard to acknowledge the hand of God in our distresses; it is pleasanter to trace that hand in our gifts and prosperities. Jehovah punishes with reluctance, and of the manifold instrumentalities of punishment at His call, the one to be dreaded is famine. It is well when suffering operates in bringing the soul to God.

LESSONS:—1. *War is a fruitful source of suffering and ruin.* 2. *National apostasy from God is punished with national calamities.* 3. *Famine reveals the helplessness of man, and his absolute dependence on God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 24. Evil men wax worse and worse. As Benhadad accomplished nothing by his raids, he made an attack with his entire force. A perverse and stubborn man cannot endure to be frustrated, and when he is, instead of leading him to submissiveness, as it ought, it only hurts his pride and makes him more irritated.—*Lange.*

Verse 25. The value and worthlessness of money. 1. Money is valuable only as a medium of exchange for the absolute necessaries of life. 2. Is freely parted with under the pressure of starvation. 3. Is powerless to avert death.

— The famine within the walls was more terrible than the sword without. Their worst enemy was shut within, and could not be dislodged of their own bowels. Whither hath the idolatry of Israel brought them? Before they had been scourged with war, with drought, with dearth, as with a single cord; they remain incorrigible, and now God twists two of these bloody lashes together and galls them even to death. There needs no other executioners than their own maws. Those things which in their own nature were not edible, at least to an Israelite, were now both dear and dainty.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Of all the judgments of God in this world, none is more terrible than famine. It is a scourge which draws blood. It often happens that God takes this scourge in hand when, in spite of manifold warnings, His name is forgotten in the land, and apostacy, rebellion, and unbelief are prevalent. —*Krummacher.*

Verses 26-29. The horrible inhumanity. 1. Revealed in its most revolting aspects in extremity. 2. Seen in the triumph of sheer animalism over the keenest instincts of natural affection. 3. Beyond the power of king or council to obviate. 4. Is controlled only by the restraints of Divine grace.

— Necessity leads to prayer whenever there is a spark of the fear of God remaining; but where that fear is wanting, "Necessity knows no law," becomes the watchword. The crime of the two women is a proof that where men fall away from God they may sink down among the ravenous beasts. Separate sores which form upon the body are signs that the body is diseased and the blood poisoned. Shocking crimes of individuals are proofs that the community is morally rotten.—*Lange.*

Verses 30 - 33. **A desperate monarch.** 1. Humbled and bewildered by the sufferings and extremities of his people (verse 30). 2. Vows vengeance on the innocent (verse 31). 3. Repents his rash decision, and hastens to prevent its execution (verse 32). 4. Is constrained to acknowledge the national suffering as a punishment for sin, and to seek Divine help in its removal (verse 33).

Verses 30, 31. See here a faithful picture of the wrongheadedness of man in misfortune. In the first place, we half make up our minds to repent in the hope of deliverance; but if this is not obtained at once and in the wished-for way, we burst out in rage either against our fellow-men, or against God Himself. Observe, moreover, the great ingratitude of men. Jehoram had already several times experienced the marvellous interference of God; once it fails, however, and he is enraged. The garments of penitence upon the body is of no avail, if an impenitent heart beats beneath it. Anger and rage, and plots of murder, cannot spring from the heart that is truly penitent. It is the most dangerous superstition to imagine that we can make satisfaction for our sins, can become reconciled to God and turn aside His wrath, by external performances, the wearing of sackcloth, fasting, self-chastisement, or the repetition of prayers. The world is horrified at the results of sin, but not at sin itself. Instead of confessing, "We have sinned," Jehoram swears the man of God shall die.—*Lange.*

Verse 31. This imprecation, which the king wishes immediately to execute, proves that his distress of mind was no wholesome fruit of the recognition of his own guilt, such as the law coming to his view must have produced, but only a consequence of his contemplating the heart-rending misery that now for the first time stands before his eyes in all its frightfulness, for which he wished to wreak his vengeance on the prophet whom he held to be the prime cause of the appalling necessity, probably because he had given the advice not to surrender the city on any condition, with the promise that God would deliver them if they humbled themselves before Him in sincere repentance and implored His aid. By putting on a garment of hair, the king believed he had done his part; and since, notwithstanding this, the expected help did not come, he fell into a rage which was to be expended on the prophet. This rage arose, indeed, only from a momentary ebullition of anger, and soon gave way to the better voice of conscience. The king hastened after the messenger whom he had sent to behead Elisha, in order himself to prevent the execution of the death order which he had given in the haste of his burning rage; but it proves that true repentance, which springs from the recognition of the necessity as a judgment imposed by the Lord, was still wanting in the king. The act of desperation to which his violent passion had hurried him would have taken place had not the Lord protected His prophet and revealed to him the design of the king, so that he could take measures to prevent it.—*Keil.*

Verse 32. He that foresaw his own peril provides for his safety. "Shut the door, and hold him fast at the door." No man is bound to tender his throat to an unjust stroke. The same eye that saw the executioner coming to smite him, saw also the king hastening after him to stay the blow. The prophet had been no other than guilty of his own blood if he had not reserved himself awhile for the rescue of authority. O, the inconstancy of carnal hearts! It was not long since Jehoram could say to Elisha, "My father, shall I smite them?" Now he is ready to smite him as an enemy whom he honoured as a father. Yet again, his lips had no sooner given sentence of death against the prophet, than his feet stir to recall it.—*Bp. Hall.*

— "Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?"—Repentance. 1. Is a commendable feeling when it is the reversal of a cruel and unjust policy. 2. Loses no time in seeking to undo the evil that was threatened. 3. Leads to the removal of suffering that human rage is impotent to cure.

Verse 33. "Behold, this evil is of the Lord." These are the words of a despairing man, in whose soul, however, a trace of faith is still concealed. For in the very fact that the king shows this frame of mind before the prophet, he lets it be understood that he still cherishes a feeble glimmer of hope and confidence in the Lord, and wishes to be directed and encouraged by the prophet. This encouragement is accordingly imparted to him.—*Keil.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLIGHT OF THE SYRIANS.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. A measure of fine flour—This *seah* would probably contain about three gallons of flour. In the gate of Samaria—*i. e.*, the *market*. Agricultural and garden produce from the country were brought to the gates of cities for sale. Verse 2. Then a lord, on whose hand the king, &c.—This שָׁלִישׁ may be described as a knight or chariot-warrior; the plural word is rendered in 1 Kings ix. 20, "*rulers of his chariot*" (see Note *in loc.*) The king, when on foot abroad, would usually be attended by his highest courtier, resting his hand on his arm. Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven—Omit *if*. The Lord will, &c.—הִנֵּה is הֵן, demonstrative: "*Lo! behold*, the Lord will." Strong irony; scoffing incredulity. Verse 3. Four leprous men—Perhaps living in some lazar-house outside the gate (see Numb. v. 3, 4). Verse 5. In the twilight—This "twilight"—בַּנֶּשֶׁף—was not the early dawn, but the *evening twilight*, as is evident from verse 9, and also from the king's prompt action, which was "*in the night*" (verse 12). Verse 6. Hear a noise—קוֹל. This sound as of the march of two hostile armies was evidently a supernatural illusion; and it is an unimportant question whether the illusion was objective or subjective. God created it for His own purpose. Kings of the Hittites . . . kings of Egypt—General phrases for the *northern* and *southern* kings. Verse 9. Some mischief will come upon us—*Guilt*, or punishment of guilt. Verse 10. Horses tied, asses tied, and the tents—In Eastern encampments, the tents are placed central, and the cattle picketted around outside as a defence. Hence the lepers first come to the "horses and asses," then to the "tents." Verse 11. And he called the porters—Being the soldier on guard, he could not leave his post, so called to other soldiers within the gate, who carried the news to the palace guards. Verse 13. One of the servants answered, &c.—His advice to the king, who suspects a stratagem, is given in confused words, but means—Send out five scouts; if they perish, then their fate will be only as the fate of "the multitude of Israel" is sure to be if no Divine deliverance arises. Verse 14. Took two chariot horses—שְׁנֵי רֶכֶב סוּסִים. *two pairs of horses*. After the host of the Syrians—*lit.*, after the *camp*. Verse 16. And the people went out—The news that the enemy had fled in a panic sped through the city, and the crowds poured out in a rush to seize the stores and spoil of the Syrian camp. Such plenty was found that food was sold at nominal prices to the famished people. Verse 17. Charge of the gate—Thus the king placed his "knight," who the day before had derided Elisha's prophecy, in the very position for the predicted fate to overtake him. By such blunders, knowing not what they do, men unwittingly work out God's fore-ordained plans.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-20.

THE UNFAILING CERTAINTY OF THE DIVINE WORD.

In this chapter we have an illustration of how the Scripture narrative subordinates everything to the setting forth of the Divine word and purpose. To the historian there is ample material for the most graphic picture-writing: the beleagured city wasting in famine—the lepers: their desperate decision, their struggle with the spirit of covetousness in the midst of plenty; their generous recognition of the claims of a common brotherhood—the alarm and rout of the Syrians—the mad stampede of the famished citizens when the news of the flight was confirmed, and the wild avidity with which the provisions and treasures of the Syrians were seized—all this is told with the utmost simplicity, and would not be told at all, but to point out the fulfilment of a promise and a threat (compare verses 1, 2, with verses 18-20). Jehovah interposes to arrest a national calamity at the last moment, and the people are taught to respect His prophet, and to receive His word for their warning and instruction. They are again taught the utter worthlessness of their heathen deities in extremity. Observe—

I. That the Divine word is uttered at a time when it seems very unlikely that its promises or threatenings will ever be fulfilled. 1. *The natural obstacles to its fulfilment seem insuperable.* Samaria was closely invested by a powerful and numerous army. Within was famine; without was the sword. Every passing moment was in favour of the besieging host; starvation would soon bring the victory denied to their arms. It seemed very improbable that flour and barley, that had become almost a forgotten luxury to the besieged, should be both abundant and cheap on the morrow. How often are the Divine utterances environed with mystery and improbability: *e.g.*, the promise to Abram of a numerous posterity; the threat of the deluge; the prophecies concerning Messiah; the gifts and operations of the Holy Ghost; the call and salvation of the Gentiles. What appears impossible to us is the normal order with God. Human faith is tested; Divine power is vindicated. 2. *The Divine word is ridiculed by the unbelieving.* "If the Lord would make windows in Heaven might this thing be." Such was the sneer of a Jewish peer, probably the prime minister of Jehoram. We can almost hear his scornful laugh, as he pictures Jehovah opening heaven, and showering down meal and grain like rain. Would it arrest his mockery to hear his doom so promptly threatened that he should see it, but not partake of it? Unbelief is highly offensive to God; it is the parent of the grossest sins, and deprives man of the richest blessings. The discontented Hebrews saw the promised land; but their unbelief prevented them entering into its possession. It is an evidence of the blindness and audacity of sin, that it questions the word of infinite Goodness and Justice.

II. That the Divine word is fulfilled by unexpected agencies. "The Lord made the host to hear a noise" (verse 6). This may have been the noise of the same host whose movements David was once permitted to hear in the tops of the trees, and which led him on to the conquest of the Philistines (2 Sam. v. 24). Or the noise may have had no objective reality, but may have been a mere delusion produced in the minds of the Syrians. In either case it was caused by the Lord, and the Syrians were led to imagine that Jehoram had hired against them the armies of other nations. The sight of horses and chariots encouraged the servant of Elisha (vi. 17). The noise of horses and chariots terrified the Syrians. The Lord can make the ordinary senses and faculties of the human mind the means of blessing or of punishment. The

Syrians fled in dismay, and in such headlong haste as to leave their provisions and baggage behind them. Samaria was delivered and knew it not, and might have remained in ignorance for several days. But the word of the Lord *must* be fulfilled, and the lepers—beings from whom every one shrank with disgust—are used as messengers of joyful tidings. Not till the lepers were surfeited with spoil, did they listen to the dictates of a common humanity; but the night is deepening, and the word of the Lord must be fulfilled on the morrow. The news of the leprous messengers is received with suspicion, and the cautious king is unwilling to act; but the morn is breaking, and the word of the Lord must be fulfilled. The counsel of the king's servants prevails, two chariots are timidly sent forth, the news is confirmed, and the camp that threatened death a few hours before, furnishes in abundance the necessaries of life. Thus, by the most unlikely agencies, and in the most unexpected way, the Divine purpose is accomplished.

III. **That the Divine word is fulfilled with unfailing certainty.** "And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken" (verse 18). The spoil of the deserted Syrian camp fulfilled the promise of cheap food; and the death of the unbelieving nobleman, who was crushed by the overwhelming crowd of famished citizens, in their wild eagerness to press through the gate, fulfilled the threat, "Thou shalt see with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." With what gratitude and with what awe should we regard the word of God! With gratitude, because its promises are so rich and sure; with awe, because its threatenings will be inevitably fulfilled. As certain as the moving glacier, impelled by an irresistible law, bears down all obstruction, and buries in ruin whatever lies in its course, so certainly will the word of God, impelled not by blind, unthinking force, but by the loftiest intelligence and irreproachable justice, bring to pass its threatenings against the impenitent and disobedient. That people is hopelessly sunk that is not moved and instructed by either promise or threatening.

Lessons:—1. *It is a solemn responsibility to declare or listen to the word of God.* 2. *The most formidable nation cannot prevent the fulfilment of the Divine word.* 3. *The word of God should be reverently feared, and implicitly trusted.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1, 2. The Divine method of relief. 1. Is seen in the moment of human extremity. 2. Makes demands upon our faith. 3. Is inexplicable to the unbelieving. 4. Magnifies the Divine power and generosity.

Verse 2. The children of this world consider their unbelief to be wisdom and enlightenment, and they seek to put that which is a consolation and an object of reverence to others in a ridiculous light. The Lord will not leave such wickedness unpunished. It is only too often the case that high-born and apparently well-bred men at Court take pleasure in mockeries of the word of God and of its declarations, without reflecting that they thereby bear testimony to their own inner rudeness, vulgarity, and want of breeding. It is a bad sign of the character of a prince, where scoffers form the most intimate circle of his retinue. Unbelief is folly, because it robs itself of the blessing which is the portion of faith.—*Lange.*

Prophecies before they be fulfilled are riddles; no spirit can read them but that by which they are delivered. It is a foolish and injurious infidelity to question a possibility, where we know the message is God's. How easy it is for that Omnipotent hand to effect those things which surpass all the reach of human conceit! H

God intended a miraculous multiplication, was it not as easy for Him to increase the corn or meal of Samaria as the widow's oil? Was it not as easy for him to give plenty of victuals without opening the windows of Heaven, as to give plenty of water without wind or rain? The Almighty hates to be distrusted.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 3, 10. The conduct of the lepers illustrative of varying phases in human experience. 1. *Desperate in extremity* (verses 3, 4). Death threatened them at every point. To enter the city was to starve—to remain inactive was to die—they could be no worse if they threw themselves upon the mercy of the enemy. A drowning man will snatch at a passing straw. The dread of death drives many to the most desperate measures. 2. *Forgetful and selfish in sudden prosperity* (verse 8). They were intoxicated with the sight of such abundant spoil, and not content with allaying the pangs of hunger, they were carried away with the spirit of greed, and hid the treasure they had so suddenly acquired. Their captivity rendered them forgetful of the starving city. The chief butler, when restored to his wealth and dignity, forgot the imprisoned Joseph (Gen. xi. 23). Sudden prosperity brings its special perils. 3. *The subjects of reflection and of humane and generous impulses* (verses 9, 10). Their consciences smote them—they thought of their starving brethren—they could no longer delay to carry the tidings of deliverance and plenty. The grosser demands of their animal nature were satisfied, and the instincts of their higher nature began to assert themselves. Hunger, and the excitement of sudden plenty, had demoralized their better feelings; but when the famine fiend was expelled, they felt again the generous pulse of a common brotherhood. And yet how few who are blessed with abundance are remarkable for generosity!

Verses 3, 4. How often we meet with a similar disposition. Instead of a joyful and believing look up to Heaven, a faithless looking for help from human hands; instead of submission to God, a dull discontent—a despair which quarrels with the eternal. And what language is this—"If they kill us, we shall only die?"—as if the grave was the end of men, and the great beyond were only a dream; or as if it were a matter of course that the pain of death atones for the sins of a wasted life, and most rightfully purchases their pardon and a reception into heavenly blessedness. Our life lies in the hand of God, who sets its limit which we may not anticipate. Circumstances may indeed arise in which a man wishes for death. It makes a great difference, however, whether this wish comes from weariness of life, or whether we have, with Paul, "a desire to depart and to be with Christ." Only when Christ has become our life, is death a gain.—*Krummacher.*

Verse 6. It is only necessary that in the darkness a wind should blow, or that water should splash in free course, or that an echo should resound from the mountains, or that the wind should rustle the dry leaves, to terrify the godless, so that they flee as if pursued by a sword, and fall, though no one pursues them. It happens to the unconverted man as it did here to the Syrians. God causes him to hear the rumbling of His anger, the roaring of the death floods, the thunder of His law, and the trumpet sounds of the judgment day. Then he flees from the doomed camp in which he has dwelt hitherto, and hurls away the dead weight of his own wisdom, justice, and strength.—*Lange.*

Verses 8, 9. Many a one gets chances to acquire property dishonestly, to enjoy luxury and debauchery, to gratify fleshly lusts, and to commit other sins; and, if he is secure from human eye, he does not trouble himself about the all-seeing eye of God; but his crime is discovered at last in his own conscience, and, by God's judgment, it is revealed and punished. Conscience can, indeed, be benumbed for a time, but it will not rest for ever; it awakes at last, and

stings all the more the longer it has been still. He who conceals what he has found is not better than a thief.—*Wurt. Summary.*

Verse 9. Glad tidings. 1. When they offer life to the perishing. 2. May be borne by the afflicted and despised. 3. May be wickedly suppressed. 4. Should be eagerly proclaimed by all who have benefited by them.

— How far self-love carries us in all our actions, even to the neglect of the public! Not till their own bellies and hands and eyes were filled did these lepers think of imparting this news to Israel. At last, when they themselves are glutted, they begin to remember the hunger of their brethren, and now they find room for remorse. Nature teaches us that it is an injury to engross blessings, and so to mind the private as if we had no relation to a community. We are worthy to be shut out of the city gates for lepers, if the respects to the public good do not oversway us in all our desires, in all our demeanour; and well may we, with these covetous lepers, fear a mischief upon ourselves if we shall wilfully conceal blessings from others.—*Bp. Hall.*

(Verse 9).—The moral and spiritual claims of London. The lepers revelled for some hours, forgetful of the many of their countrymen who were starving with hunger, and after they had done all for themselves that they could, *then* they thought of their brethren. We may apply the circumstances of this narrative to the conduct of the citizens of London. Observe—I. That we are in possession of a blessing peculiarly adapted to benefit our fellow-countrymen. The gospel contains glad tidings to all people, and is adapted to benefit man in four senses. 1. *As conscious of guilt.* All men know that they are transgressors, and in a city like this, who has not to look upon himself as guilty and unholy? The gospel reveals the remedy; and this message it is in the power of the humblest to communicate. It is not necessary he should ascend the pulpit or the hustings; he may do it by his life and by his visits. 2. *As exposed to temptation.* Great cities are ever the focus of vice. Such was Ninevah, such was Rome, such is Paris, such is London. 3. *As liable to suffering.* Sorrow is the portion to which flesh is heir; and as a city these are generally concentrated. Think of the want of labour, the high price of provisions, the ravages of disease, the frauds of the designing, the failure of credit, &c. 4. *As subject to death.* It is the law of nature and the sentence of God that all must die; and oh! what a mass does this city present to death! II. That we have been guilty of a culpable omission in neglecting to communicate those things. 1. *Because the melancholy circumstances of our fellow-citizens have not been realized by us.* Had these four lepers thought of the extent of actual misery among their fellow-citizens, they would have hastened to them as soon as they had satisfied their first cravings. So it is with us; we do not think of our fellow-men around us. 2. *Because the relative importance of our fellow-citizens has not been by us regarded.* London, as it is the seat of royalty, the head of legislation, the residence of nobility and gentry, the mart of commerce, is the resort of all classes. We forget that we dwell in a vortex, which draws from many a league around, and draws many into ruin. That grain of gunpowder, yonder, if ignited, will explode, but will do little mischief, because it is alone. But let it be one of a vast magazine, and where shall the mischief end? 3. *Because our own necessities have been exaggerated.* The lepers would say they had not had a meal for a month, that they were so naked they wanted clothing, so poor they wanted treasure, so sick they wanted medicine. True, he is to blame who does not keep his own vineyard; but there is reason to fear that a spirit of selfishness has hitherto prevented the citizens of London doing the good they might. 4. *Because the design of the Divine goodness has been overlooked.* You are blessed that you may bless. You are

fights, and your lights should shine. We overlook the design of God in doing us good, if we suppose it for ourselves alone. III. **We should experience the most powerful emotions at the remembrance of our past indifference.** 1. *An emotion of shame for our criminal neglect.* While we have thought of the distant village, and the distant heathen, we have forgotten those who breathe the same air, and reside in the same city. 2. *An emotion of sorrow for inseparable mischief.* While the lepers were eating almost to surfeit, and loading themselves with treasures almost to faintness, another and another in the city fainted and died. 3. *An emotion of alarm for threatening evil.* We are conscious of the anti-social and demoralizing effect of infidelity. Could it be diffused, it would do infinite mischief. 4. *An emotion of pity for present destitution.* Think of the claims of the metropolis. We ask your pity for those by whom you got your wealth. We must feel for those who are perishing, as He who felt beheld a devoted city, and wept over it.—*The Pulpit.*

— **The day of good things.** I. *The text describes the times in which we live.* "This day is a day of good tidings." 1. Because Jesus Christ has obtained a complete conquest over all our enemies. 2. Because He has procured an ample provision for all our necessities. 3. Because He has made many of us participate in the provisions of His love. 4. Because He has opened channels for the publication of these good tidings to others. II. *The text reproves our indifference to the miseries of others.* "We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings." 1. While this disposition exists in our minds, we dishonour our character. 2. We disobey Christ's commands. III. *Consider our punishment if we delay to send help to those who need it.* "If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us." 1. If we delay in the work, our eyes shall see the destruction of our kindred. Our souls shall want the joys of God's salvation. 3. Our conduct will receive the condemnation of Christ. IV. *The text suggests the course of conduct you ought to adopt under the present circumstances.* "Let us go and tell the king's household." We should carry the Gospel to our poor brothers and sisters. 1. Because they are perishing for lack of knowledge. 2. Because success is certain. 3. Because opportunities are vanishing.

Verse 10. Outcast and despised men were destined, according to God's providence, to announce to the threatened city in the crisis of its danger the great and wonderful act of God. God is wont to use slight and contemptible instruments for His great works, that He may, by the foolish things of the world, confound the wise. Fishermen and publicans brought to a lost world the best good news—the Gospel, which is a power to make all blessed who believe in it.

Verses 12-16. **Hunger v. Suspicion.** I. *Suspicion, the fruit of unbelief*—readily gives up the hope of Divine deliverance. II. *Suspicion regards the tidings of relief as a ruse of the enemy*—the lack of truth and righteousness leaves the mind a prey to endless questionings. III. *Hunger catches at the faintest shadow of relief*—is prepared for great risks—the enemy without cannot be more formidable than starvation within. IV. *The exigencies of hunger overcome the scruples of suspicion.* The wary king is persuaded to despatch two chariots to reconnoitre, so that if one is seized, the other may escape. The news brought by the lepers is confirmed. The risks of hunger are rewarded with the much-needed provision.

Verse 12. By such a stratagem as here mentioned, Tomyris, the Scythian queen, circumvented and destroyed Cyrus and his Persians. So when the Christians besieged Ptolemais, and were themselves at the same time besieged by Saladin, they were so hard bested for victuals that they were forced to beg and buy it of their enemies. This, when Saladin per-

ceived, he pretended to go his way, leaving his camp full fraught with plenty of all things; and when the hunger-starved Christians fell upon the spoil in a confused way, he, turning short again, slew them.—*Trapp.*

Verse 17. The perils of a crowd. In this incident, God speaks to us by showing us—1. What a terrible thing is a crowd. 2. What a terrible thing is thoughtlessness. 3. How terrible it is to break God's laws, natural and moral. 4. That it is safest to do always that which is right. 5. That we should prepare to meet our God.—*Spence.*

— The judgment of the king's officers proclaims aloud, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." His corpse became a bloody seal upon the words of Jehovah and of His prophet. In the last days, also, when the abundance of the Divine grace shall be poured out like a stream, in the midst of the greatest misery, many despisers of the glorious promises of God will see the beginning thereof, but will not attain to the enjoyment of it; they will be thrust aside by marvellous judgments.—*Lange.*

— Whether he had been an oppressor of the people, and was therefore justly trodden to death by them, is uncertain; but that he had shamefully trodden under foot the honour of God's power is upon record, wherefore he was worthily trampled on by the hungry people who would not be kept in by his authority. The belly hath no ears; and hunger breaketh through stone walls Such a like death Constantius Paleologus, the last Greek emperor, suffered in the gate of Constantinople when the Turkish army pressed into that city and took it, A.D. 1453.—*Trapp.*

Verses 18-20. Unbelief. 1. Is rebuked by the faithful fulfilment of the Divine word. 2. Is signally punished. 3. Is a universal danger to man. 4. Should be prayerfully guarded against.

Verse 20. Extreme hunger has no respect to greatness. Not their rudeness, but his own unbelief, hath trampled him under foot. He that abased the power of God by his distrust, is abased worthily to the heels of the multitude. Faith exalts a man above his own sphere; infidelity presses him into the dust." "He that believes not, is condemned already."—*Bp. Hall.*

CHAPTER VIII.

ELISHA IN DAMASCUS.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Then spoke Elisha**—The pluperfect tense, *Now Elisha had spoken.* This section dates prior to chapters v. and vi., but is given here as an introduction to the narrative which follows. Verse 4. **And the king talked**—*Was* (that moment) *talking.* Note the coincidence. While talking; at that very moment "beheld the woman!" (verse 5). God times incidents with precision; "things *work together*," interweave (Rom. viii. 28). Verse 6. **King appointed a certain officer**—סָרִיס. Its primary meaning is *a eunuch*; its secondary, a *court minister.* **All the fruits of the field since**, &c.—The word תְּבוּאָה is better rendered "*fruits*" or produce, than *rent*; yet it has also the meaning, *gain, profits* (Prov. iii. 14). Verse 7. **And Elisha came to Damascus**—Elijah, his master, had been divinely commissioned to this (1 Kings xix. 15), and now Elisha, "by the instigation of the Spirit" (*Theniius*), sets out to the task he inherited to perform. Benhadad, king of Syria, was sick—He, hearing of Elisha's arrival, sent to enquire if he should recover; his messenger bearing propitiatory gifts for the prophet. Verse 9. **Took a present with him, even of**, &c.—*lit.*, present in his hand, *and* of every good thing of Damascus. **Forty camels' burden**—A camel's burden is some six hundred pounds; but it was customary to give only a small burden to each, in order that the presentation, being borne by many, might have a more imposing effect, and express greater respect. Verse 10. **Go, say unto him, thou mayst certainly recover**—A

sentence which, like Delphic oracles, has two possible meanings, each the contradiction of the other. The words are, אֱמֹר לֹא חָיֹה תִּחְיֶה. The second word, written לֹא, is *in sound* the same as לוֹ. The *keri* retains the form given in our text, לֹא, *to him*, "Say *to him*, thou wilt live." The *kethibh* adopts the form לוֹ, *not*—"Say, thou wilt *not* live." The sentence *spoken* would convey either meaning, and each form has equal authority. Doubtless the eager king would seize the hopeful meaning of the words, while Hazael would reserve in his own thoughts the doom which the words held. It should, however, be noted that Hazael reports the prophet's words without uttering either the לֹא or לוֹ. Verse 11. **He settled his countenance steadfastly**—Elisha's fixed gaze, followed by his weeping, must have convinced Hazael that his guilty purpose to usurp the throne of Benhadad was known to him. Verse 13. **But what, is thy servant a dog, &c.**—But surely dogs are less capable of guilty craft and horrid atrocities than base men are! The more brutal Hazael should not have maligned the nobler brute, by suggesting that any creature except man was capable of such villany. כֶּלֶב, *dog*, is an Eastern term for a servile and despicable man (see 1 Sam. xvii. 43, &c.) Verse 15. **Spread it over his face**—The bed coverlet, a quilt of thick cotton or wool. This, steeped in water, would effectually suffocate. It is, however, suggested that in warm countries guaze nets wetted, to keep off flies and gnats, or in cases of fever, are spread over a sleeper's face. But it is superfluous to evade Hazael's murderous design, for a wetted guaze would not prevent respiration. The coverlet is properly described as "a thick cloth," מַכְבֵּר (comp. Judges iv. 18), a mantle, and it killed the king—which Hazael desired. Verse 16. **Joram the son of Ahab**—See Notes on chap. iii. 1. Verse 18. **The daughter of Ahab**—Attaliah. It was through her influence the king introduced the worship of Baal into Judah (2 Chron. xxi). Verse 19. **To give him alway a light**, *and* **to his children**—*i. e.*, "*even in* his children," that his kingdom should be kept from becoming extinct. Verse 21. **Zair**—*Vulgate* says *Seir*; other authorities suggest *Zoar*. **The people fled to their tents**—*i. e.*, the men of Judah. Verse 22. **Yet Edom revolted**—*So* Edom revolted, thus fulfilling Gen. xxvii. 40, for though the Edomites were re-subjugated for a brief period (chap. xiv. 7, 22), they were never again vanquished.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-6.

The Potent Influence of a Good Man.

I. His counsel is valuable, and gratefully acted upon. The Shunammite had good reason to respect the word of Elisha. She had evidence of the sympathy and power of the prophet in the restoration of her dead son. When, therefore, he warned her of the coming famine, and advised emigration, she and her son promptly obeyed. The result showed the wisdom of the advice, and justified their confidence in the prophet; they were preserved during the years of famine, and received again the property they had relinquished. Here we see how the kindness shown by the Shunammite receives still further reward. There is nothing so fruitful in blessing as kindness. In the great dilemmas of life we seek counsel, not from the frivolous and wicked, but from the wise and good. A good man has the destiny of many lives in his hands; a word from him has great weight. With what profound reverence and loving obedience should we accept the words of Him who bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought! who maketh the devices of the people of none effect, and whose counsel standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations (Ps. xxxiii. 10, 11).

II. His beneficent acts are the theme of popular conversation. "The king talked with Gehazi, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done" (verse 4). A good action cannot be hid. Sooner or later it will emerge from the obscurity in which it was first done, and become the talk of a nation, until it reaches even royal ears. All good actions do not attain such distinguished popularity. There were many good things that Elisha said and did of which history takes no notice. A good act may be remembered and

applauded for generations, while the name of the actor is unknown. Who can tell how much bloodshed was spared, in the already too bloody battle of the military at Nanci, during the French revolution of 1790, by the bold, heroic woman who screamed to the wild, unmanageable mutineers not to fire the second cannon, and who made her screams effectual by flinging a pail of water on the dangerous engine. Her name is unknown, but history immortalises the deed. The more a good man is known and appreciated, the greater interest is taken in all the details of his life. Indeed, there is danger in magnifying the most ordinary sayings and doings into undue significance and importance. The nation that can sing of the exploits of its heroes "in the brave days of old" should also be forward in extolling the noble efforts of good men in modern times. If the age of chivalry is past, the spirit of chivalry lives and burns in the breasts of not a few in our day.

III. **His holy and unselfish life is a testimony for Jehovah in the midst of national apostasy.** The life of Elisha, if less bold, fierce, and meteor-like in its manifestations than that of Elijah, was more profoundly impressive in its influence for good. The idolatrous Jehoram was smitten with admiration for the gentle-mannered prophet, and must be convinced of the superiority of Elisha's God. But the better feelings of the king were transient; he was too closely wedded to his idolatry to thoroughly break away from it, and, with constant calls and warnings to return to his allegiance to Jehovah, he drifted towards the doom in which all his house was to be involved. As every star in the firmament declares the glory of God, as every flower of earth reveals some feature of the Divine beauty, so every holy life testifies of the character of God. Human goodness is but a reflection of the Divine. In the darkest night of national apostasy, Israel was favoured with an Elisha, whose divinely-illumined life threw a bright stream of light across the gloom. How deplorable the condition of that nation from which all moral worth is excluded! The modern doctrine of Nihilism aims at this. A zealous propagandist of this rank materialism lately defined their teaching thus:—"Take heaven and earth, state and church, kings and God, and spit upon them; that's our doctrine!" This is plain enough. And what would they substitute for God, the soul, and moral law? A wild, conscienceless demagogy, without belief or scruple, giving the rein to brute humanity, keeping open house for every appetite and lust. Such would be the condition of the nation bereft of living witnesses for God and truth.

IV. **His reputation is the means of promoting the ends of justice** (verses 5, 6). There was surely a Divine providence at work that brought the suppliant Shunammite into the presence of the king at the very moment when Gehazi was rehearsing the great works of Elisha. During her absence of seven years her estate was occupied by others, and ordinarily it would be a most difficult proceeding to dislodge the occupants. She wisely went direct to the highest authority, and while the influence of Elisha's reputation was fresh upon the mind of the king, for his sake the prayer of the Shunammite was immediately granted. Justice triumphed; her land and all its produce for the seven years were restored to her. It requires power to enforce the claims of justice, and the highest kind of power is goodness. The arrangements of justice are more likely to be permanent when brought about by the influence of righteous principles, than when compelled by physical force. The presence of a holy character in society is a powerful check upon injustice and wrong.

LESSONS:—1. *Goodness is not inherited, but divinely bestowed.* 2. *A good man is not always himself conscious of the value and extent of his influence.* 3. *It is an unspeakable blessing to a nation to possess men of eminent goodness.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-3. Famine, pest, war, and all other forms of calamity, form an army which is subject to the command of God; which comes and goes at His command; which is ready to attack, or ready to retire, as He may order; and which can assail no one without command. They are sometimes commissioned to punish and to be the agents of the Divine justice, sometimes to arouse and to bring back the intoxicated to sobriety, sometimes to embitter the world to sinners and push them to the throne of grace, and sometimes to try the saints and light the purifying fires about them. So no man has to do simply with the sufferings which fall upon him, but, before all, with Him who inflicted them.—*Krummacher.*

Verse 1. Lessons taught by famine. I. That God has entire control over the productive powers of nature. 2. That God may permit famine as a judgment on account of national sins. 3. That a time of famine should induce national humiliation and repentance. 4. That the extremity of human suffering is the opportunity for magnifying the Divine power and goodness.

— It is a long famine that shall afflict Israel. He upon whom the spirit of Elijah was doubled, doubled the punishment inflicted by his master. Three years and a-half did Israel gasp under the drought of Elijah; seven years' dearth shall it suffer under Elisha. The trials of God are many times more grievous for their sharpness than for their continuance. This scarcity shall not come alone; God shall call for it. Whatever be the second cause, He is the first. How often, how earnestly, are we called to repentance, and stir not! The messengers of God fly forth at the least beck, and fulfil the will of His revenge upon those whose obedience would not fulfil the will of His command.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 2. No nation was more opposite to Israel than the Philistine, none more worthily odious; yet there does the Shunammite seek and find shelter. Even the shade of these trees that are unwholesome may keep us from a storm. Everywhere will God find room for His own. The fields of the Philistines flourish, while the soil of Israel yields nothing but weeds and barrenness. Not that Israel was more sinful, but that the sin of Israel was more intolerable. The offers of grace are so many aggravations of wickedness. No pestilence is so contagious as that which hath taken the purest air.

Verse 3. She that found harbour among Philistines finds oppression and violence among Israelites; those of her kindred, taking advantage of her absence, had shared her possessions. How often does it fall out that the worst enemies of a man are those of his own house! Both our fears and our hopes do not seldom disappoint us. It is safe trusting to that stay which can never fail us, who can easily provide us both of friendship in Palestine and justice in Israel. We may not judge of religion by particular action; the very Philistine may be merciful when an Israelite is unjust; the person may be faulty when the profession is holy. —*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 4-6. What is here told us by king Jehoram presents him to us from his better side. His desire to learn all of Elisha's acts, still more the way in which he was ready to help the distressed Shunammite to the recovery of her property, testify to a receptivity for elevated impressions and to a disposition to yield to them. By the fact that he recognised all that was extraordinary in the person of the prophet, and yet that he did not desist from his false line of conduct, he showed that, in the main point, the relation of himself and of his people to Jehovah, nothing good could any longer be expected of him. His better feelings were transitory and

ineffectual. He continued to be a reed swayed hither and thither by the wind, easily moved, but undecided and unreliable, so that, finally, when all the warnings and exhortations of the prophet had produced no effect, he fell under the just and inevitable judgment of God.—*Lange.*

Verse 5. How happily does God contrive all events for the good of His own! This suppliant shall fall upon that instant for her suit when the king shall be talking with Gehazi, when Gehazi shall be talking of her to the king: the words of Gehazi, the thoughts of the king, the desires of the Shunammite, shall be all drawn together by the wise providence of God into the centre of one moment, that his oppressed servant might receive a speedy justice. Oh, the infinite wisdom, power, mercy of our God, that insensibly orders all our ways, as to His own holy purposes, so to our best advantage!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 6. The word of God often extorts from an unconverted man a good and noble action, which, however, if it only proceeds from a sudden emotion, and stands alone, resembles a flower which blooms in the morning and in the evening fades and dies True servants of God, like Elisha, are often fountains of great blessing, without their own immediate participation or knowledge.

— The widow may thank Elisha for this. His miracle wrought still, and puts this new life in her dead estate: his absence did that for the preservation of life which his presence did for restoring it from death. She who was so ready to expostulate with the man of God upon the loss of her son might, perhaps, have been as ready to impute the loss of her estate to his advice. Now that for his sake she is enriched with her own, how does she bless God for so happy a guest! When we have forgotten our own good turns, God remembers and crowns them. Let us do good to all while we have time, but especially to the household of faith.

— The true spirit of obedience I. Seen in a ready belief in the Divine word. II. Seen in the willingness to abandon home and property at the Divine call. III. Puts the soul and all earthly things under the Divine care. IV. Has restored more than was abandoned.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 7-15.

The Lust of Ambition.

I. That the lust of ambition makes man keenly alive to every opportunity of accomplishing its aims. Benhadad, the king of Syria, was sick. The dream of Hazael, cherished, perhaps, for years, was coming nearer to its realization. Death may come any hour; then the sceptre, the crown, boundless pomp and power are his. With what sinister eagerness would he watch every changing phase of the sick king's affliction! with what facility would his busy brain lay down the plans of future enterprises! A crown has a dangerous fascination for some minds. Gibbon describes, in his vivid and stately style, the heroic manner in which Septimus Severus became emperor of Rome, an ambition he had cherished for years. He waited his opportunity, his keen glance took in the bearing of every revolutionary change in the imperial city, and when the crowning disgrace was reached of offering the empire by auction to the highest bidder, he saw the time for action was come. Though opposed by two formidable rivals, his promptness and vigour conquered all difficulties. He ascended the imperial throne, which he found, as others have done before and since, was more difficult to sustain than to acquire. The ambitious man lives an anxious, restless life: he is ready to seize on every favouring circumstance.

II. That the lust of ambition may be cherished under the guise of devotion to its victim. Hazael readily complies with the wish of the sick monarch, and, with all the oriental display of profuse generosity, and the oriental mingling of pomp and humility, he enquires of the man of God as to the recovery of his master. It would seem as though none was more concerned than he, and yet the while plotting the most effectual way of removing the only obstacle to his aspiring designs. An unholy ambition generates falseness and unreality: the man's outer life gives the lie to his true character. The great dramatist has depicted this in the double-faced, hesitating conduct of the great regicide —Macbeth—

> To beguile the time,
> Look like the time: bear welcome in your eye,
> Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under it.
> Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
> False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

III. That the lust of ambition blinds man as to the atrocities it may urge him to commit. When Elisha, looking with prophetic insight in the mirror of the future, detailed to this man the horrible crimes he foresaw he would commit, Hazael stood aghast at the bare possibility of sinking down into such a monster of iniquity; and yet, doubtless, all these cruelties were perpetrated in the wars which this usurper carried on in Israel. Hazael reigned more than forty years, and during that time greatly harassed and oppressed the Israelites (see verses 28, 29; ch. x. 32, 33; ch. xii. 17, 18; ch. xiii. 3-7, 22; Chron. xxiv. 23, 24). A man who is under the spell of an unholy ambition is hurried on to sins and excesses of which he little dreamed, and from which in earlier days his better nature stoutly recoiled. He is spurred on by the—

> Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself.

IV. That the lust of ambition is unscrupulous as to the methods by which it attains its ends. 1. *It will employ falsehood* (verse 14). Hazael assures the king that Elisha prophesied his recovery—the exact opposite of what the prophet had said. He purposely deceived Benhadad, intending to put him off his guard. But he who meditated a darker crime, and in whose heart Elisha's words had roused a boundless ambition, was not too good to lie. Truth or falsehood is of small concern to one who grasps at power. The ambition must be sated, though truth is trampled on at every advancing step. 2. *It shrinks not from murder* (verse 15). The man who shrank with indignant horror at the simple enumeration of the outrages he might commit, heartlessly smothered his royal master on the following day—a method of assassination that would leave no marks of violence on the dead body, and give colour to the suspicion of suicide rather than murder. There was but one obstacle now between Hazael and his long-coveted prize—a royal life—and that is sacrificed without compunction. O, infatuate, short-sighted mortal! The sceptre rashly seized with the red hand of the murderer will change into a cross of trial, the crown into one of thorns, the throne into a bed of torture!

LESSONS:—1. *Ambition dissociated from sound moral principle is full of peril.* 2. *There is no act of wickedness of which unholy ambition is incapable.* 3. *The most commendable ambition is to get and do the most good.*

THE INFLUENCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES UPON HUMAN CHARACTER (verse 13).

Hazael came to the prophet to inquire whether his master would recover from his sickness. The answer is ambiguous. So far as the disease itself was concerned, he *might* recover. Yet his days were numbered; and the purpose to kill

him was already being formed in the heart of his hitherto faithful servant. The prophet saw before him not only the king's enemy, but also the man who would one day inflict dire evils upon Israel. The thought of the horrors about to come to his people made the man of God weep. Hazael asks the cause of his sorrow. Elisha tells him frankly, and in the plainest terms, what was in the not very distant future. Hazael starts back with horror, when he sees in this prophetic mirror the image of his own baseness. "Is thy servant a dog?" The prophet seems to evade the question; and yet, in his reply, we have the full and complete explanation, if not to Hazael, at least to us, of all that occurred. "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." Is this man, then, a base and guilty hypocrite? Is he a man who hides under the cloak of pretended affection for his master, and reverence for humanity, his fiendish designs? How are we to account for the fact that he actually did all that Elisha foretold, if he was not a hypocrite? If we take humanity as it is, not as it has been described in poetry, and sometimes in what was intended to be prose, we shall have no difficulty in accepting both statements—that of Elisha regarding the atrocities of Hazael, and that of Hazael regarding his horror and amazement at the very mention of the crimes. Hazael simply failed to take into account the influence of *circumstances upon human character*.

I. There is a doctrine of circumstances utterly at variance, not only with the teachings of Scripture, but also with the experience and deepest convictions of mankind—a doctrine which asserts, or appears to assert, that circumstances make men, and that the only difference between the noblest saint and the basest criminal is a difference simply in the structure of the brain, and the character of the surroundings. Some men teach this, but no man believes it, or acts upon it, either in his feelings respecting his own deeds, or his judgments of the moral character of the actions of his friend. But we must, while rejecting a doctrine so monstrous, yet remember that, in a very real sense, circumstances have a power over character and life. Hazael's error is one of the commonest among ourselves. How many promises are made in early life that cannot afterwards be kept without doing moral wrong to ourselves and others! When the public mind is filled with horrors of some tragedy, or when men see one who has been universally trusted and respected, convicted of some base crime, the tendency is to deny to the criminal the common feelings of humanity, and to attribute to a momentary impulse of an insane mind, what has been the outcome of long-formed habits of thought and settled purposes. Life grows not by sudden freaks of this sort; but, like the plant or tree, derives its nourishment from its surroundings, and, year by year, though it may be imperceptible, assimilates these to itself. In order to form its present and its future, God ever requires its past, which men may forget or ignore. We may here learn a lesson from, and see some analogy in, the teachings of geology regarding the formation of the solid earth on which we tread. Go to the rock, and learn from its formation that once it was loose sand-dust, blown about by every wind! Behold in that rock, now fossilised, the print of the tiny foot, the ripple mark left by the wave on the falling leaf, even the march of the rain-drop as it fell there ages before. Now all is solid, it is true; but once it was far otherwise. So do we find character and life daily forming itself, and being formed, by the slow action of outward circumstances. They are to the mind as food is to the physical frame. The babe grows under the influence of nourishing food, pure air, and healthy exercise. So does our mental and moral nature grow up to a large extent by means of what is supplied in the surroundings.

II. Circumstances bring men into new temptations never felt before. Hazael king of Syria, or even with the throne within his reach, would be a very different person from Hazael the honoured servant of his master. The very

thought passing through his mind, the very possibility of attaining such a position, would give a shock to the moral nature of a man who had been wont to regulate his life by expediency. Circumstances not only suggest new temptations, but also give an intensity to those already felt. As we pass from youth to manhood and womanhood, we enter into a new world, peopled with inhabitants whom we may have seen before, but only as trees walking, not in distinct and definite outline. Now they become actual powers in life. They speak to us in a language we can understand, and inspire us with new ideas. So when we enter into new relationships in life we extend the area of our pleasures, it may be, but we also make new desires and wants possible, and expose our moral nature to new dangers. It is a mere commonplace to say that city life, to those who have been brought up in the quiet of the country, will awaken new cravings. A few years amid these surroundings will be sufficient to change the old ways of thought and habits of life. It is not so much that the promises before made, and the views of life entertained, betokened any unreality or hypocrisy, but that they were the outcome of ignorance and inexperience of life. From this point of view, and in their bearing on this subject, nothing can be more instructive than the examples recorded for our guidance in the Holy Scriptures, "profitable indeed for correction and discipline in righteousness." Had Cain been told that one day he would lift up his hand against Abel his brother, he would, and not without feeling, have said, "Am I a dog?" Joseph's brethren could hardly have sold their brother into slavery had they not first fitted themselves for this by envy, malice, and hatred. Nor did Potiphar's wife persecute Joseph altogether from pure hatred, but because her conduct made this necessary, in order that she might appear righteous in the eyes of his master. Suppose we apply the same principles to the crimes associated with Christ's death. Pilate was not a dog, yet he did "great things." He simply gave way to popular clamour, in order to gain popular favour (a vice by no means confined to Roman governers), and out of this weakness, or time-serving policy, came all his guilt and crime. If we judge the traitor Judas by the same standard, we shall, perhaps, stand more in awe of that which leads men to awful crimes. His terrible end shows that he did not realise where his avarice and his greed were leading him. Step by step, instead of resisting the tempter, he yielded to circumstances, and at last found himself completely under the powers of darkness. "And it was night," says the Evangelist.

III. If we could, in one sentence, point the moral lesson of the history of crime in all ages, and in all countries, it would be this for us all: "Is thy servant a dog?" No, thy servant is no dog. He is a man—has in him two natures struggling for the mastery. He is not without his good impulses. Perhaps he often resolves to give himself up to their sway, but he yields too readily to the passions that war against the soul; he gives way to the circumstances that surround him, and that appeal to him. Visit our great convict prisons. Who are their immates? No doubt many of the so-called criminal classes are men and women who come from the lowest ranks of the community. Yes, but they are not all such; yea, these very names may blind us to the origin, progress, and end of wicked deeds. The "criminal classes" are what they are because of the power of circumstances over human nature; because "man is also flesh," and when once he gives way to the baser passions, tends ever to sink lower and lower in the scale of being, to hand down his very vices to his children. But you will find many in these crowds to whom all life's pleasures are now denied, who have belonged to the higher classes of society. They yielded to the lie, they gave way to passion, they yielded themselves up to the pleasures of sin. Now they stand aghast at the position in which they have placed themselves, and the depth to which they have fallen. Had you told them of this terrible fall years before, they would have been amazed and incredulous. "Therefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

IV. My text seems to suggest *that much of what passes for virtue amongst us may simply be vice not manifested by circumstances.* How much do women who are sometimes boastful owe to the fact that the world is harder in its judgments on their sins, than in the case of the other sex! How much to the fact they are more protected by circumstances! The rich man knows nothing of the temptations of the man hard pressed by circumstances, and hence his hard and unjust censures. The poor man, protected by his very poverty, knows not the temptation of those nursed in the lap of wealth; hence, when he hears of the sins of the other, he flatters himself on his superiority. He owes it not to his moral heroism, but to his surroundings. We have spoken much of the power of circumstances. Let not man think he is the creature of his surroundings. By God's grace he may rise above them, and triumph over them, making his very passions minister to his success, and making his enemies his benefactors. There is for man, frail, weak, temptable as he is, and surrounded by everything that can minister to his weakness, one, and only one safe path. It is the way of holiness. It is the path of humility and obedience to the Divine word. These examples are given us as beacon lights to warn of danger, and to point to the one and only way of safety. He only is perfectly safe who commits his way to the Lord, who yields himself to the guidance of the word, who is conscious of weakness, and who, ceasing from man, looks above him to the strong Son of God, who can succour him when tempted. He only is safe who has been delivered from himself, and who is being "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." —C. W. P.

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 7-15. Hazael discovered. 1. *Unconscious wickedness* Hazael had a heart that was capable of planning and executing great wickedness, yet knew it not. Would not believe it when told. If we could have the wickedness of our hearts disclosed to us, how appalled we should be. We judge ourselves by the past. That is bad enough. But we think we shall and can do nothing worse than that. We forget that the things of the past furnish only a hint of the direction of the future, and may be excelled in the future. More evil in each of us, even the best, than we suppose. We should fear ourselves, distrust ourselves, and only trust God. What might we do under severe temptation. No safeguard against sin but in the help of God. 2. *Anxious enquiry.* Benhadad a wicked and idolatrous king. Very ill and full of anxious concern. Has no one to enquire of but the prophet Elisha, whose God he denied. In life many deride those ministers of religion whom they send for in sickness, and disobey that God whose pardon they need in sickness as the only source of comfort. If we love and serve God, we shall not be anxious to know whether we shall live or die. 3. *The prediction accomplished.* Elisha looked in Hazael's face and read his character and history there. Wept at that sad sight. Hazael was indignant, yet did the crime predicted of him. Had he thoroughly believed it to be possible, and been right-hearted, how he would have prayed. Let us believe the possibility of future sin, and pray earnestly for delivering grace. If we stand, let us take heed lest we fall. Many strong men have fallen; let us not be too self-reliant. Hazael might recall the prophet's words when too late. So may we. Let us seek Divine grace betimes. LEARN:—1. *To trust in the Lord at all times.* 2. *To put no confidence in the flesh.* 3. *Not to judge of the future by our present feelings.* 4. *Seek Divine forgiveness of the past, and Divine guidance for the future.*—*Class and Desk.*

Verses 7-10. The power of a holy character. 1. Is recognised everywhere, even by the enemies of God: "The man of God is come hither"

(verse 7). 2. Inspires the hope of succour in affliction: "Enquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" (verse 8). 3. Commands the deference of the rich and powerful (verse 9). 4. Gives the deepest significance to words spoken at a critical moment (verse 10).

— **The subduing power of suffering.** 1. Bears down the strongest and proudest warrior 2. Convinces the idolater of the helplessness and vanity of his own deities. 3. Renders the sufferer ready and eager to receive help from any quarter. Benhadad humbly seeks assistance from the man whose life he had threatened (chapter vi. 13). In the days of his health and prosperity he had not heeded the lesson of Naaman's cure, but in the hour of sickness he consults the same wonderful physician.

Verses 7, 8. Benhadad upon the sick bed. 1. The rebellious, haughty and mighty king, the arch-enemy of Israel, who had never troubled himself about the living God, lies in wretchedness; he has lost courage, and now he seeks the prophet, whom he once wished to capture, just as a servant seeks his master. The Lord can with his hammer, which breaketh in pieces even the flinty rock, also make tender the hearts of men. Those who are the most self-willed in prosperity are often the most despairing in misfortune. Not until the end approaches do they seek God; but He cannot help in death those who have never thought of Him. 2. He does not send to ask the prophet, What shall I, a poor sinner, do that I may find grace and be saved? but only whether he shall recover his health. The children of this world are only anxious for bodily welfare; about eternal welfare they are indifferent. It should be our first care in severe illness to set our house in order and to surrender ourselves to the will of God. The time and the hour of death are concealed from men, and it is vain to enquire about them.

Verse 7. The man of God is come! That was the cry in the heathen city of Damascus, and the news penetrated even to the king, who rejoiced to hear it. This did not occur to Elisha in any city of Israel. Blessed is the city and the country where there is rejoicing that a Man of God is come!—*Lange.*

— Whether for the idolatries, or for the famine of Israel, the prophet is gone into Syria, no doubt Naaman welcomed him thither, and now would force upon him thanks for his cure, which the man of God would not receive at home. How famous is he now grown who was taken from the team! His name is not confined to his own nation; foreign countries take notice of it, and kings are glad to listen to him, and woo him with presents. The king of Syria, whose counsels he had detected, rejoiced to hear of his presence; and now, as having forgotten, he had sent a whole host to beseige the prophet in Dothan, sends an honourable messenger to him, laden with the burden of forty camels.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 9. What will not princes part with for their life and health? "Wherefore should I die, being so rich?" said Cardinal Beauford, Chancellor of England in the reign of Henry VI. "If the whole realm would save my life, I am able either by policy to get it, or by riches to buy it. Fie! will not death be hired? Will money do nothing?"

Verses 11-13. The possibilities of human character detected and exposed. I. *That some men are especially gifted in reading the tendencies of human character.* Elisha had supernatural discernment. He saw in the eyes of Hazael, as in a mirror, the reflection of his true character, and had the courage to tell him of it. Much of the real man is imaged in the face, though it is possible to cherish the foulest villany under a misleading exterior. II. *That the vision of prospective wickedness fills a tender heart with profound grief.* Elisha beheld, as in a panorama, the enormities Hazael would perpetrate, and the prophet wept not only because of the obduracy

and cruelty of character he foresaw in Hazael, but also because of the sufferings he saw coming on his own nation on account of their sins. How much grief is spared to some parents that they cannot see the crimes their children afterwards commit! They have grief enough when they discover the undoubted facts, without the torture of anticipation. III. *That man indignantly spurns the imputation of great crimes of which he is unconscious.* "What is thy servant—a dog—that he should do this great thing?" The career of Hazael illustrates a humiliating truth, that, though unconscious of it, there is in human nature the possibility of the greatest crimes.

Verses 11, 12. He who has a good conscience is never disturbed or embarrassed if anyone looks him directly in the eye; but a bad conscience cannot endure an open, firm look, and trembles with terror at every rustling leaf. Elisha weeps. These were not tears of sentiment, but of the deepest pain, worthy of a man of God, who knows of no greater evil than the apostacy of his people from the living God, the determined contempt for the Divine Word, and the rejection of the Divine Grace. Where are the men who nowadays weep such tears? They were also tears of the most faithful love, which is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up. So our Lord wept once over Jerusalem (Luke xix. 41), and Paul over Israel (Rom. ix. 1-3).—*Lange.*

Verse 11. **Heart reading.** We believe the man lives not, and never did live, who could stand such inspection without quailing before it. Is there one who can affirm that he could stand with unblanched cheek before the man whom he believed to be viewing his naked soul, divested of all the purple and fine linen which cover its littleness—its foulness—its deformities—its soreness from the outer world? Is there one who could endure, without confusion of face—without a quivering frame—the keen dissection of his character, his conduct, his spirit, by even the most friendly hand in the world? Would he be content that any human eye should trace the tortuous meanderings of feeling in regard to any one matter in which he has ever been engaged—the unholy thought—the ungenerous imputation—the low suspicion—the doubt—the dislike—the covetousness—the hate—the contention—the lust of the flesh—the lust of the eye—the pride of life—that more or less enter into, and defile with, the prints of villanous hoofs the fairest garden of life? In this we show how much more fear we have of man than of God. To us it is of infinitely less concernment, both for this world and the world to come, what man thinks of us, than what God thinks—what man knows than what God knows. Yet, while we shrink with such instinctive dread from the too near survey of fellow-sinners, we manage to get on very quietly, with small trouble of mind, in the perfect knowledge that One who cannot be mistaken has a sleepless eye fixed with unceasing vigilance upon our hearts. This keen susceptibility to the inspection and good opinion of man, and this comparative indifference to the constant survey of God, is a familiar thing, and strikes us little because it is familiar; but it is nevertheless one of the strangest anomalies of our nature, and is beheld with astonishment and grief by the angels of God. In their view it is an inversion of the whole order of life and being. To them God is all—His inspection is all; and that different state of things which gives more practical importance to the survey of a sinful fellow-creature like ourselves, must present a greater mystery than any of those deep problems in material or spiritual nature which men have vainly laboured for a thousand years to solve. To us it is plainer. Evil is, alas! more intelligible to man than to angels; and the good and the true is more intelligible to them than to us. It is sin which has cast a veil between our souls and God—a veil transparent to Him, but opaque to us. He sees

us as clearly in our deformity as He did in our beauty; but we have ceased to see Him as He is. We do not realise the unseen. We live by sight, and not by faith. How different would be our conversation and our walk if we lived and moved in the ever-present consciousness that the Unseen Eye was upon us, and that the opinion of us hereafter to be pronounced in the presence of the assembled universe is a matter of inconceivably more importance to us than all that the world can think or say. Let us believe that to walk and act from day to day with this as a vital consciousness about us —without any supreme anxiety but to walk so as to please God—is a most pleasant life—is the very antepast of Heaven. There is no bondage in it. It is perfect freedom; and is happiness as complete as this world allows.—*Kitto.*

Verse 13. Wicked men are carried into those heights of impiety which they could not in their good mood have possibly believed. Nature is subject to favourable opinions of herself, and will rather mistrust a prophet of God than her own good disposition. How many, from honest beginnings, have risen to incredible licentiousness, whose lives are now such that it were as hard for a man to believe they had ever been good, as to have pursuaded them once they should prove so desperately ill!—*Bp. Hall.*

— Subserviency before men is always joined with falseness and hypocrisy. Therefore, trust no one who is more than humble and modest. Hazael called himself a dog, while he plotted in his heart to become king of a great people. It is the way with all hypocrites that they bend and cringe, humble themselves and conceal their tricks, until they perceive their opportunity and have found the key of the situation. There is scarcely anything more discordant and disgusting than the dialect of self-abasement when it bears upon its face the stamp of affectation and falsehood.

Verses 14, 15. **The regicide.** 1. Does not scruple to tell a lie. 2. Seeks to commit his great crime in such a way as to create least suspicion. 3. Is spurred on by an ungovernable ambition. 4. Nevers reaps the advantage for which he has sacrificed everything.

— It is the curse which rests upon him who has sold himself to sin, that all which ought to awaken his conscience and terrify and shock him out of his security, only makes him more obstinate, and pushes him on to carry out his evil designs.

Verse 15. Buchanan tells of Natholicus, the thirty-first king of the Scots, that, having usurped the crown, he sent a trusty friend to a famous witch, to know what success he should have in his kingdom, and how long he should live. The witch answered that he should shortly be murdered, not by an enemy, but by his friend. The messenger instantly enquired, by what friend? "By thyself," said the witch. The messenger at first abhorred the thought of any such villany; but afterwards, conceiving that it was not safe to reveal the witch's answer, and yet that it could not be concealed, he resolved rather to kill the king to the content of many, than to hazard the loss of his own head. Thereupon, at his return, being in secret with the king to declare to him the witch's answer, he suddenly slew him.—*Trapp.*

— At heart proud, haughty, and imperious, Hazael affects humility and submissiveness. Towards his master, who had entrusted him with the most important commission, he is false and treacherous. He shrinks from no means to attain his object. He lies and deceives, but, at the same time, he is cunning and crafty, and knows how to conceal his traitorous purposes. When, alarmed and exposed by the words of the prophet, he can no longer keep them secret, he marches on to the crime; although he seeks to execute it in such a way that he may not appear to be guilty. With all this he combines energy, courage, cruelty, and a blind hatred against Israel, as the sequel shows. On account of these

qualities he is well fitted to be, in the hand of God, a rod of anger, and a staff of indignation. The Lord makes the vessels of wrath serviceable for the purposes of His government; and here we have again, as often in the history of redemption, an example of wickedness punished by wickedness, and of godless men made, without their will or knowledge, instruments of holiness and justice.—*Lange.*

— O! Hazael; thou shalt not thus easily stop the mouth of thine own conscience. That shall call thee traitor, even in thy chair of state, and shall check all thy royal triumphs with, "Thou hast founded thy throne in blood!" I am deceived if this wet cloth shall not wipe thy lips in thy jolliest feasts, and make thy best morsels unsavoury. Sovereignty is painful upon the fairest terms; but upon treachery and murder, tormenting. Woeful is the case of that man whose public cares are aggravated with private guiltiness; and happy is he that can enjoy a little with the peace of an honest heart.—***Bishop Hall.***

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 16-29.

The Woeful Disasters of an Unholy Alliance.

In this paragraph we detect traces of the baneful influence of the iniquitous Jezebel. The brief histories of Jehoram and Ahaziah present a terrible example of the way in which one bad woman can radically corrupt entire dynasties and kingdoms, and of the curse that rests upon matrimonial connections which are only formed in order to attain political objects. The kingdom of Judah became tainted with the idolatry that had degraded and enfeebled Israel, and there was danger that the social morality of Jerusalem would sink to the low, black level of Samaria. The dynasty of Omri was the most disastrous in the annals of Israel, and is stained with the darkest crimes. Such a succession of weak and wicked rulers could not continue for ever. The doom of the dynasty is declared. The darkening clouds of vengeance are closing round. The victims and the avenger are being prepared. The hour to strike is at hand. We have here an indication of the woeful disasters that befell Judah because of its unhappy connections with Israel, and how the wrong-doers were ripening for punishment.

I. **That an unholy alliance may be unwisely sanctioned by good and holy parents.** Jehoshaphat, the father of Jehoram, was one of the noblest kings of Judah. Influenced by genuine piety, he effected important reforms in his kingdom. He abolished idolatry; he raised a formidable army, and strongly fortified the frontiers; he promoted a flourishing commerce; he administered justice with strict impartiality; he maintained and encouraged the worship of Jehovah; he was beloved by his people, and his fame spread in every direction. It was a serious mistake when he first entered into confederacy with the profane court of Israel. His connection with Ahab in war (chap. iii.), and with Ahaziah in commerce (2 Chron. xx. 35), both ended disastrously. But the greatest wrong, and what became a fruitful source of evil, was his sanctioning the marriage of his son with a daughter of the house of Ahab. If he was induced to it by the prospect of advantage, he was utterly disappointed. Not only did he suffer himself, but many calamities happened to his descendants in consequence of this affinity. Parents cannot be too careful in advising their children as to matrimonial alliances; and children should respect the counsel and riper judgment of parents on so delicate and important a subject. Mere sentiment and passion should not be allowed to blind the sense of what is just and wise and holy. The best of parents in other respects may be weak in this. And

yet, if a mistake is made, it is made for life, and many other lives are involved in the suffering.

II. That an unholy alliance often leads to a career of unexampled wickedness (verse 18). Though Jehoram reigned during the life-time of Jehoshaphat, he did not follow the good example of his father, but chose Ahab for his pattern, if he did not exceed him in vileness and cruelty. He murdered his six brothers, as it would appear, for no other reason than to become possessed of the treasures which his father bequeathed to them (2 Chron. xxi.), not from any jealousy that they would interfere with the succession to the throne. A king who did not shrink from fratricide may be easily conceived capable of any crime. Jehoram grew into a monster of impurity and wickedness, and, after a brief reign of eight years, he died of a horrible desease, unhonoured, and unregretted. It is some consolation to society that the career of its most debauched and brutalised members is brief. Outraged nature retaliates with suffering and premature death. A bad wife may drive her husband to the vilest excesses; there is no escape from her baleful influence but in the grave. How different would have been the history and career of some men if they had married differently!

III. That an unholy alliance corrupts and demoralises the national life. (verses 20-22). Edom and Libnah revolted. They despise a king who was both weak and wicked. Jehoram made some attempt to put down the rebellion, and though he was successful in a night engagement against the Edomites, his soldiers gave up the battle and ran away to their homes. Edom, which had been tributary to Judah from the days of David, was thus lost to Jehoram. The national life was demoralised, and the people were heedless as to what became of the national power and prestige. Jehoram had the memorable distinction of being the first to introduce the abominations of Baal worship to Judah, and the result was soon evident in the lowering of the moral tone of the national character. In the rulership of Judah, it was a great drop from Jehoshaphat to Jehoram; but in the moral life of the people it was a greater drop from Jehovah to Baal!

IV. That an unholy alliance infects posterity with its evils (verses 25-29). The bad influence of Jehoram did not die with him. It survived in Ahaziah, who inherited and practised the worst features of his father's example. The history, brief as it is, is careful to point out his relationship to the worst dynasty that darkens the history of the Jewish kings, and to show the predominating tendency of his life to be evil. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Ahab." Sin hardens the heart and produces obstinacy of disposition. The practice of sin becomes an infatuation, until the sinner becomes incorrigible. So that

> "You may as well
> Forbid the sea for to obey the moon,
> As by oath remove, or counsel shake,
> The fabric of his folly."—*Shakspeare.*

But the network of retribution is being drawn tighter round its victims. It is not without design that Joram, Ahaziah, and Jezebel are brought together in Jezreel. The avenger is at hand, and the three chief representatives of the house of Ahab must be the first to fall.

V. That the worse sins of an unholy alliance cannot revoke the Divine promise. "Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah for David His servant's sake, as He promised him to give him alway a light and to his children" (verse 19 comp. with 1 Kings xi. 36). By the formal adoption of idolatry Judah had

revolted from Jehovah and became as bad as Israel, and, but for the Divine promise, the royal family of Judah would have been as thoroughly extirpated as that of Israel. O, the infinite patience of God! The basest ingratitude, the most outrageous sins, cannot invalidate the fidelity of God. David was assured that he should not lack a successor on the throne of Israel, so that his name should be as a light continually kept burning by a constant supply of oil, until the Messiah came, in whose glorious advent the greatest earthly luminary should be quenched. The pledge, though in abeyance for many long, weary years, was fully redeemed. And now, "while wicked men from generation to generation perish in their sins, the son of David, the light of His church, ever liveth to protect, bless, and comfort His people."

LESSONS:—1. *Great care should be taken in forming the friendships and alliances of life.* 2. *Unutterable mischief has resulted from an ill-assorted marriage.* 3. *No union should be entered into that is not based on the mutual love of God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 16-29. The spirit of the house of Ahab. I. Perversion of all divine and human ordinances. Wicked and corrupt women set the tone and ruled over their weak husbands. II. Immorality, licentiousness, murder, and tyranny. III. Contempt, on the one hand, for the richness of God's long-suffering and goodness; and, on the other, for the warnings of God's judgments and chastisements. What a different spirit animated the household of a Cornelius (Acts x. 2), of a Crispus (Acts xviii. 8), of a jailer at Philippi (Acts xvi. 34).

— **The importance of family relationships.** I. *The great influence which they exert.* They necessarily bring about relationship in spirit and feeling. They work gradually, but mightily. One member of the connection draws another with him either to good or to evil. In spite of their pious father and grandfather, Jehoram and Ahaziah were tainted by the apostasy of the house of Ahab. How many are not able to resist the evil influences of these connections, and therefore make shipwreck of their faith, and are either drawn into open sin and godlessness, or are transformed into a superficial, thoughtless, and worldly character. II. *The duty which therefore devolves upon us.* The calamities which even the pious Jehoshaphat brought upon his house, nay, even upon his country, arose from the fact that he gave the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel to his son, as a wife, and did not bear in mind that relationships which do not rest upon the word and commandment of God bring discontent and ruin. Therefore beware of entering into relationships which lack the bond of faith and unity of spirit, however grand or advantageous externally they may seem to be. Do not, by such connections, transplant the Ahab and Jezebel spirit into your house, for it eats like a cancer, and corrupts and destroys to the very heart.—*Lange.*

Verse 18. **An indiscreet marriage.** I. May be mistakenly promoted by the best of parents. II. Makes the beginning of married life morally perilous. III. Leads on gradually to the commission of great sins. IV. Involves many in disgrace and suffering.

Verse 19. Behold the faithfulness of God, who, for the sake of the fidelity of the father, chastises indeed the son, but yet will not utterly destroy him. God will sustain His kingdom to the end of the world, in order that a holy leaven may remain, no matter how many may be found who scoff at His promise to sustain His church.—*Cramer.*

—**The Divine faithfulness.**—1. Is not rendered inefficacious by human sin. 2. Guarantees the fulfilment of

every Divine promise. 3. May well inspire the unbeliever with alarm. 4. Provides the light of hope in the darkest period of human history.

Verses 20-24. **A demoralised monarch.** 1. Weakens government. 2. Is powerless to suppress rebellion. 3. Loses the respect and attachment of his subjects. 4. Dies without being regretted, and is buried without sorrow.

Verse 27. **The influence of a bad example.** 1. Is felt by succeeding generations. 2. Is difficult to counteract when emanating from a near relative. 3. When deliberately followed tends to shorten life, and leads to misery and ruin.

Verses 28, 29. **Confederates in a false religion.** 1. Are capable of strong personal attachments. 2. Share with one another the risks and fortunes of war. 3. Not devoid of sympathy in affliction.

Verse 29. **As he so gladly joined himself to Ahab's family, and was so fond of spending his time with them, there it was, by the ordering of Divine providence, that he met his end.** Those who, by their hostility to the Lord, belong together, must come together, that they may perish together. Jehoram was so anxious to be healed of the bodily wound which the Syrians had given him, that he left the army, and returned to Jezreel; but the wounds of his soul, which he had inflicted upon himself, caused him no trouble, and did not lead him back, as they should have done, to Him who promised, "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds" (Jeremiah xxx. 17). The children of this world visit one another when they are ill. They do it, however, not in order to console the sick one with the word of life, and to advance God's purpose in afflicting him, but from natural love, from relationship, or other external reasons. Their visits cannot, therefore, be regarded as Christian work.—*Calwer Bib.*.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FALL OF THE OMRIAN DYNASTY.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Elisha called one of the children of the prophets**—A prophet-disciple, occupying towards Elisha the same relation he himself once stood in towards Elijah. The rabbis suggest it was Jonah. This anointing of Jehu was a further heritage of duty bequeathed by Elijah to Elisha (comp. 1 Kings xix. 17; see *Notes* on 2 Kings viii. 7). **Box of oil**—Flask or vial, פַּךְ from פָּכָה *to trickle down*. **Ramoth-Gilead**—A city of peculiar importance to Judah and Israel, as affording a strong defence, east of Jordan, against the Syrians. Verse 2. **Jehu**—Doubtless Joram's ablest general, and entrusted, so Josephus states, with supreme command of the Israelitish army at Ramoth-Gilead by Joram on his being wounded (viii. 29). **Make him rise up from among, &c.**—Do it privately, for sake of thine own safety, and that none may interrupt thine act of anointing him. Verse 4. **Even the young man the prophet**—Or, even the prophet's young man; or, himself a prophet (see Note on v. 1, *supra*). Verse 8. **I will cut off, &c.**—*Vide* Critical Notes on 1 Kings xiv. 10. The phrase "Shut up and left" stands for those who are *of age* and those who are *minors*. Verse 10. **In the portion of Jezreel**—It was formerly Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings xxi. 15 *sq.*, and 23). The "portion"—חֶלְקַת—in its wider sense, refers to the strip of country outside the city's wall, hence a place for foul deposits, and thus suggests Jezebel's degradation that upon it her body should be cast. Verse 11. **This mad fellow**—הַמְשֻׁגָּע—Wild rhapsodist. Soldiers would regard the grotesque appearance and mysterious conduct of this young man as indicating that he was crazy. Prophets were not infrequently regarded as "mad"; the divine fervour in them, and their asceticism, being viewed as proof (Jeremiah xxix. 26; Acts xxvi. 26).

Ye know the man and his communication—Jehu half suspects that they had plotted to hoax him by this man's action, in order to incite him to revolt, and intimates that they knew more than they appeared to know. Hence their reply, "**False!**" (v. 14). They deny the insinuation. Verse 18. **Then they hasted . . Jehu is king**—Their prompt acquiescence in Joram's overthrow, and their proclamation of Jehu, proves that the army had no respect for Joram, who seems to have quitted the scenes of war on receiving wounds from the Syrians (viii. 29), but whose wounds were not so serious as to prevent his riding out (ix. 21), albeit it is said in v. 16, perhaps satirically, that "Joram *lay* there." Yet, although able to ride out to meet Jehu, he was much too sick to go back to the scene of war! Such conduct of indulgence or indifference would make his captains contemptuous, which prepared them to welcome Jehu, who was evidently popular with the army, as king. **Took every man his garment, and put it under him**—Spreading it on the floor for a carpet, as sign of homage (Matt. xxi. 7). Verse 21. **Each in his chariot went out against Jehu**—Rather, to *meet* Jehu. They would not have ridden out in royal equipages for a hostile attack on him. This self-indulgent king, who had been idling in his summer palace with Ahaziah, now found himself well enough to exert himself. Verse 22. **Is it peace, Jehu?**—Anxiety in the enquiry; fear of bad tidings as to the war, or of conspiracy against himself. **What peace, so long as**, &c.—Such a rebuke from a subject would at once convey to Joram Jehu's revolt. **Her witchcrafts** *are so* **many**—Her many witchcrafts continue זְנוּנִים, spiritual whoredom, *idolatry*, and כְּשָׁפִים, magical incantations, *witchcrafts* in general. Verse 25. **Remember how . . the Lord laid this burden upon him**—Or "took up this oracle concerning him." A divine sentence against a person or place is commonly called "a burden" (Isa. xiii. 1, &c.) מַשָּׂא means *burden; something uttered, a sentence;* and נָשָׂא means to *take up*, lift up; hence נָשָׂא מַשָּׂא אֶל *took up a sentence or oracle.* Jehu and his lieutenant were together in Ahab's retinue, and overheard the prophet's sentence. Verse 27. **Smite him also in the chariot**—After these words there is an omission in the MS., which is, however, naturally supplied by inserting the verb of execution, וַיַּכֻּהוּ. Verse 30. **Jezebel painted her face and tired her head**—*i.e.*, decorated herself royally, brightening her eyes, or darkening her eyelids with antimony or lead-ore powder, and building up her head adornments, or put on her crown. Her object was surely less to captivate Jehu than to overawe him with her majesty as queen. **Verse 31. Had Zimri peace**—Warning Jehu of a like fate (1 Kings xvi. 10-18).—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-14.

The Minister of Divine Vengeance.

It was a dark day for Israel when Omri became its king. He imposed idolatry upon the people by the strong hand of law. He was the author of those celebrated "statutes"—celebrated for their infamy—which "made Israel a desolation" (Micah vi. 16). Ahab and Jezebel maintained and improved upon this idolatrous policy. Israel became utterly corrupt, and, as an evidence of the vigour and influence of the rule of Ahab, Judah was being infected with the same moral poison. Had this rule continued much longer, there was danger that the Jewish people would be lost in heathenism, and the grand purpose of their being chosen and trained—the maintenance and spread of the religion of Jehovah—would have been frustrated. In furtherance of the Divine designs and in the interest of the world, the dynasty of Omri, after a career of more than forty years, must come to an end. All warnings were disregarded, and every attempt at reformation had failed. Judgment can be no longer delayed, and the minister of Divine vengeance is ready to enter upon his work. It is terrible, sanguinary work that has to be done, and the man who undertakes it must be above all effeminate qualms. He must be a man of iron, of iron will, of iron hand, of iron heart.

I. That the minister of Divine vengeance may be for years unconsciously preparing for his work. More than twenty years before, the Lord revealed to Elijah the agencies by which the wicked house of Ahab should be destroyed, and among them was Jehu the son of Nimshi (1 Kings xix. 16, 17). This man was familiar with the fearful prediction of Elijah against Ahab when he went to take possession of Naboth's vineyard, and though fifteen years had rolled away since then, those terrible words of doom were vividly remembered (1 Kings xxi. 17-24; comp. with verse 25). Jehu little dreamed that he was to be the selected instrument of vengeance, and yet circumstances were preparing him for the office. His warlike training developed the qualities necessary for his stern and sanguinary work. In the court of Ahab was being prepared, all unconsciously to himself, the agent who was to destroy, with unrelenting pitilessness, the whole house of Ahab. Wrong cannot triumph for ever. It generates the power which by-and-bye works its destruction. The very means by which evil gains its ends are used for its punishment. Napoleon, the dictator of Europe, won his power by war, and by war he was defeated and humbled. In the neighbourhood of the bane there grows the antidote.

II. That the minister of Divine vengeance is elevated to a position of power and authority by which he may accomplish his mission. 1. *Jehu is solemnly anointed king.* It was not customary to anoint kings, except on the disturbance of the succession, as in the case of Solomon; or on the interruption of it, as in the case of Joash (chap. xi. 12); or on the transfer of the government to another family, as in this case of Jehu. It seems singular that a man like Elisha should lend himself to conspiracy and rebellion; but the prophet was acting not from any factious spirit, but according to Divine direction. The time to act was come, and the man who had so much to do—so much that ordinary men would shrink from—must be shown by the solemn and significant act of anointing that he is fully called and commissioned. The greater the work man is called to do, the more important is it he should be powerfully impressed he is empowered to do it. 2. *His authority is speedily and publicly recognised by those who are ready to help him in his mission* (verse 13). The validity of Jehu's appointment to the kingship is at once acknowledged by his companions in arms, and proclamation is made with trumpets and shouting. The army is with him; his authority is unquestioned; his power is supreme; he has the means of carrying out his terrible work of vengeance. The readiness with which the soldiery acquiesce in the new order of things indicates how feeble was their attachment to the house of Ahab, and the power that Jehu must have gained over them. Perhaps the impression was deepening on the popular mind that the doom of the house of Ahab was at hand, and could no longer be delayed. When God arises to judgment, He can make all the powers of heaven and earth contribute to the accomplishment of His vengeful purposes.

III. That the minister of Divine vengeance is clearly informed as to the character of the work he is called to do. 1. *It is a work of complete and terrible vengeance* (verses 7-10). The whole house of Ahab is to be cut off; none are excepted. "When wickedness is ripe in the field, God will not let it shed to grow again, but cutteth it up by a just and seasonable vengeance." A weak man would have quailed and trembled before such bloody work as now lay before Jehu. He could not complain of ambiguity; he clearly understood what was expected of him. He was braced up for the occasion. His impetuous and callous nature would lead him to do, without the least symptoms of compunction, what other men would have sickened even to contemplate. He was reminded by the reference to the fate of Jeroboam and Baasha (verse 9) what would be his own fate if he failed to carry out the Divine commands. 2. *The reason for the vengeance is also set forth:* "That I may avenge the blood of my

servants of the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord" (verse 7). God does not forget the sufferings and wrongs of His people. Injury done to them is done to Himself, and His justice will render the recompence. Jezebel has hunted down and destroyed the worshippers of Jehovah, wherever found, until she thought they were extinct, and that the abominations of the Baal-worship were universally adopted. It was a savage disappointment to her that she could not crush Elijah and Elisha. But the day of reckoning has come; the cry of innocent blood is heard; the murdered prophets shall be avenged. It is an addition to the punishment of the punished when they clearly understand the reason of it. Long-forgotten sins are brought back vividly to the memory, and the suffering is increased by the consciousness of its justice. Yet it may be that neither executioner nor victim fully comprehend all the reasons for retribution.

LESSONS:—1. *It is utterly futile to oppose God.* 2. *Though the patience of God delays the blow, iniquity shall not go unpunished.* 3. *The ministers of Divine vengeance are ever within call.*

ELISHA AND JEHU (verses 1-3).

The phrase, "children of the prophets," in this passage, indicates men who were taught by a prophet or prophets, and who might hope in due time to fulfil the office themselves. The notion of a class of men under this kind of education is very puzzling to some modern readers. "Was not the prophet," they ask emphatically, "the inspired man? Were not his words false if they did not proceed directly from the mouth of the Lord? How could he be trained or disciplined to utter such words?" The subject is a very important one. Elijah was, in a remarkable sense, the solitary man. "I alone," he said, "am the prophet of the Lord, while the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty. I alone am left, and they seek my life." On the contrary, his successor, Elisha, is nearly always surrounded by companions, disciples, or servants. Every passage of his history makes us understand how great the influence of the previous teacher had been; how true it was that there were numbers who had not bowed the knee to Baal during his stay upon earth; how soon, according to what seems the general law in such cases, they discovered themselves after he had left it. In the particular instance of which the text speaks, a young man out of the schools goes by the direct command of Elisha to execute an errand, which involved nothing else than the overthrow of a dynasty, and a revolution of two kingdoms.

I. If the main work of the prophet was to declare that such an event would, or would not, come to pass, or if he was a mere Æolian harp from which a chance breeze drew forth certain wild and irregular, however beautiful, notes, the idea of preparation involves an absurdity, or something worse than an absurdity. On that supposition it must mean, if it means anything, an initiation of the scholar into certain tricks by which his predecessors had been wont to impose upon the vulgar, or the communication to him of certain facts and principles known to them by which he might acquire a reputation for sudden insight and discovery. No doubt such an education as this was not unknown in the old world, as it is not unknown in the modern. It is the ordinary discipline of adepts and conjurors, of those who practise on men's fears or upon their curiosity, of those who appeal to their conscience by religious deceptions, or to their sense of mysterious powers in the natural world by philosophical deceptions. But the Jewish prophet was not primarily or characteristically a foreteller. The essence of his office did not lie in what he announced respecting the future. His sole power of declaring that which should

be, arose from his knowledge of that which had been and which was. He meditated in the law of the Lord, and in that law did he exercise himself day and night. In this exercise he learnt what was in conformity with the law, what was contrary to it. In this exercise he learnt to believe in a Divine Teacher, and to commune with Him, to believe in Him as a permanent and continual Teacher, as the Guide of his own heart, to believe that all other men's hearts were right so long as they were under the same guidance, and wrong when they were breaking loose from it. The fruits of revolt, the inward monitor enabled him to foresee and predict. The prediction might take a general form and point to a distant issue, or a number of issues; it might speak of that which was definite and immediate. There would be the same proof in both cases that the word came from a hidden source, and from a moral being; a proof addressed to the conscience of the hearer, seeing that the prediction would always come forth with some warning respecting his actual conduct, some denunciation of an idolatrous or unrighteous act. Everything, then, that was sudden in these utterances, bore witness to previous trains of thought and habits of reflection. So far from wishing to deny the existence of these, as if they interfered with the genuineness of his inspiration, the prophet would be grieved if his hearer did not give him credit for them. The knowledge of passing events, too, would be sought for, not declined, by the true prophet. He had no need to bandage his eyes that the spectator might be sure he derived his insight from some other source than actual observation. All facts were to him signs of a Divine purpose, solemn indications of truths which they could not themselves make known, but which nevertheless lay in the heart of them, and which God could discover to the patient and faithful seeker. Nor can I suppose that the knowledge which the wise king is said to have possessed of trees and plants, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop upon the wall, so far as the means of obtaining it lay within their reach, would have been scorned or scouted by these men of God. They might not have had much of it—probably much less than the soothsayers and magicians of Egypt or Assyria—less, perhaps, of traditional information on such matters than the Phœnician priests of Jezebel's court. But what they had they would make use of, looking rather to the secret powers of things than to their outward mechanism; referring the former in all cases to the government of a Personal Being; believing that in many, perhaps in most, cases they were subject to man as His vicegerent.

II. Supposing the habitual belief and work of the prophet to have been of this kind, it does not seem very strange that he should have been an educator of others, or that one main object of his education should have been to fit them for the exercise of functions like his own.

It would have been the most glaring contradiction to all his professions if he had regarded the prophetical power as something bestowed for his honour, a gift to separate him from the rest of the people. In a prophet of Baal such an opinion would have been most natural; in a prophet of the Lord God of Israel it would have been most detestable. God had given His law to the whole nation; all were under it; therefore all might study it and delight themselves in it. It was a law which imported a government over the inner man. The conscience and heart and will of every man might be awakened to know the nature of this government, to receive light from the source of light. And since light is given that it may be communicated, since it shines into a mind that it may shine forth from that mind, there was no reason why any one of the Lord's people should not be prophets. The training of the prophet would teach the king the ground of his authority, his relations to those whom he governed, his responsibility for the government of them. It would teach the elders of the city that they were not to obey the commands of an evil woman when she told them to charge an innocent man with blaspheming God and the

king, that she might get possession of his inheritance. It would teach the priests that they were not to pollute the sacrifices of God, or offer them to devils and not to Him. It would teach the owners of the land that the land was held by them of Him who had committed it to them in trust for the good of his whole people. It would teach the seller the sin of having the false measure and the bag of deceitful weights. It would teach the master the sin of oppressing the hireling in his wages. It would teach all that they were the members of one commonwealth, over which a higher than Ahab or Jehoram was ruling, and would set aside their rule to assert his own.

III. The sons of the prophets, then, were a continual witness to the Israelites against certain errors into which they were apt to fall respecting the prophetical office. The man of God might have been looked upon as a mere separate being, cut off by the awfulness of his character and dignity from the rest of his countrymen, an object of distant admiration or dread, not an example of what they ought to be. These men, taken from among themselves and associated with him, declared that he was only withdrawn from their communion that he might the better claim privileges for them which they were in hazard of losing; that he was only chosen out by the Lord God of Israel that he might the more clearly understand their national calling. If he did any strange acts, or put forth any marvellous powers, the people would see that they were exercised not in his own name, but in the name of the Lord God; not for his sake, but for theirs, since some very humble person, scarcely distinguished by a name, known only as one of an order, could perform some of the most important and perilous tasks which were committed to his master. If the sons of the prophets were entrusted with messages like that which one of them bore to Jehu, a proof would be given that the prophet was merely declaring and carrying out a purpose which must be accomplished; he did not go himself to plot against an existing order, or to earn the favour of some particular chieftain. The repeated allusions to these sons of the prophets in the story of Elisha are specially worthy of note, because there are more passages in that story which favour the notion that the man of God is a worker of prodigies and portents, than in all the rest of the Bible. Not that there is any great number of those stories. Open at hazard the life of almost any conspicuous saint in the middle ages, and you will find five miracles attributed to him for one that is given to Elisha. The more strong one's apprehension is of the degradation of the Israelitish people at that time, of their low sensual idolatry, of their reverence for evil powers, the more one feels how acts of this kind must have been needed to counteract their materialism, to undermine their religion of fraud and hatred, to establish, as no words or arguments could, the proof of an actual and a gracious ruler.

IV. Retribution is the main subject of the Scripture narrative. Elijah had told Ahab that the blood of Naboth would be required of his house. His humiliation had delayed the sentence. His enemy, who had found him out, seems henceforth to have left him alone. Perhaps the great prophet passed the remainder of his own days in peace. But there were other prophets to torment Ahab, and a still greater number, freshly brought, perhaps, by Jezebel from her own land, to deceive him. The lying spirit in their mouths drove him to Ramoth-Gilead, and Israel was left, as Micah had foretold, without a shepherd. His son Joram finds Elisha almost as terrible as his master had been to Ahab. Yet their relations were different. Joram is less of a Baal worshipper than his father. He consults Elisha; is asked by him why he does not go to the prophets of his father and mother; still is promised deliverance and victory in a war which he has undertaken with the Moabites, and is saved not once or twice by the prophet's knowledge from the Syrians. These enemies of Israel

look upon the prophet with especial dread. Once he is surrounded by them; but his servant is permitted to see invisible hosts which are on his side. These visions, Elisha's acts of power, his words of wisdom, the ruin which threatened the land from the Syrians, its unexpected rescue, are all signs that the God who had made a covenant with their fathers was with the king and the people then. Trust was then, as always, what the prophets demanded of them. They could not trust too boldly or unreservedly. To trust, would have been to repent of the calf worship, to rise out of the brutal habits which it had engendered, to begin a new life as men. But the custom of idolatry had destroyed trust in their hearts. They could only worship and tremble. The sin of the father descended upon the son with the weakness and cowardice, which were the fruits of it, increased tenfold. At the appointed day and hour the vengeance came, by just such an instrument as would seem likeliest to carry it out. Jehu the son of Nimshi had been declared to Elijah as the joint successor with Elisha in the work he had left unperformed. No two men in Israel could have been more unlike. One cried to have a double portion of his master's spirit, the other was known only as a man who drove furiously. Yet Jehu had the kind of faith which might be expected in a soldier, somewhat reckless, but with his sense of right not quenched by religious falsehood. He had heard the burden which Elijah had pronounced on Ahab as he sat with him on his chariot when they entered the plot of ground that had been Naboth's. He felt that there was an everlasting truth in the sentence, and that it must come to pass. Who should execute it he did not know then. When the anointing oil of Elisha's messenger had been poured on his head, and his comrades had cried, "Jehu is king," all the savage impulses of the soldier became quickened and elevated by the feeling that he was commissioned to punish evildoers, and assert justice. Esteeming himself a scourge of God, and rejoicing in the office, he gives full play to all his bloody instincts.

V. It causes great scandal to many amiable and worthy people, that the Scripture does not stop to comment on the atrocities of Jehu, but appears to commend his zeal, and to rejoice that what he began he accomplished. A true portrait can never be a mischievous one, and this is essentially true. Nothing is said to gloss over the ferocity of Jehu; it is exhibited broadly, nakedly. You do not want words to tell you that you must hate it. Your impulse—and it is a right one—is to do so; but there may be in the most ruffianly and brutal characters, not merely strength, not merely a clear distinct purpose, and a steadiness in following it out, but, along with these, an intense hatred of hypocrisy, a determination to put it down, not for selfish ends, but because it is hateful, which determination is good, and inspired by God. We do not meet with these characters in the world—characters with something devilish, going close beside something which is really divine; and, though the devilish is the obtrusive, and may become the pervading, part of the man's soul, you cannot help feeling that the other is in the very depth of it, and marks out what he is meant to be, and can be. Honour it; confess that it is not of earthly origin; that it does not spring from any dark root in the selfish nature. Say boldly, "that honesty, that zeal, is from above; it has the sign of a celestial parentage; just so far as that governs him, he will be a servant of his kind; aftertimes will bless him." But it is also true that the grovelling elements of his character, if they are not destroyed by this nobler fire, will only glare the more fiercely for the light which it sheds upon them, and that soon, when the fire begins to burn low, you will see, instead of that glare, nothing but dull, smouldering ashes. "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord." It is in the quiet time that a man is tested; then we find out not only what he can do, but what he is; whether his zeal for righteousness means that he will obey it; whether his hatred for what is false implies an adherence to the true. The test in this case failed. Jehu destroyed

Baal-worship, for that was foreign. He clave to the calf-worship, for that was the tradition of his fathers; and, therefore, the people went on in the downward course. They sought after evil powers. They could not trust God.

VI. Elisha, the son of Shaphat, and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, did then carry out together the words of the prophet. For these words depended upon no mortal agency. They were the expressions of an eternal law which, in some way or other, would fulfil itself. This is the great lesson which the Bible teaches in every page. The righteous Will moves on steadily and irresistibly towards its own end. The unrighteous will struggles with it, seems to prevail, is broken in pieces; but, seeing that it is Will, and not a blind necessity, which rules in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of men, it is all-important whether those who execute its decrees work in cheerful submission to it, or, in blindness, with base and private designs. This was the great question for the ministers of God's purpose, whether they were prophets or soldiers, to consider then. It is the great question for us now. Zeal is so precious a gift, is so much wanted for the service of mankind, it is so rare, that the evil spirit is certain to assault those who possess it; and, seeing that, there are a multitude of kindly, compromising men, who represent all energetic indignation against wrong as unnecessary, disturbing, unphilosophical, unchristian, and those who believe that no form of falsehood is to be tolerated, but to be abhorred, are stirred up by the indifference which others exhibit and boast of, to a kind of savageness and fury. They must, if they can, hasten on the purpose of God, and themselves execute part of His wrath. Alas! what are they striving for? "It is the driving of Jehu, for he driveth furiously." This is the best memorial that will remain of him who has let his zeal become his master, when it was meant to be his servant, and who has counted it a pleasure, instead of a hard necessity, to destroy. "O my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horses thereof!" These are the words which a king of Israel, of Jehu's house, spoke to Elisha as he lay sick and dying. He felt that a power was passing out of the world which was greater than his and than that of all the kings who had been before him, because it was a power that had, in the main, been consecrated to God, had been used in conformity with His mind, and, therefore, had spread health and peace around it. Was it better to kill the seventy sons of Ahab, or to bring up sons of the prophets? To be the executor of God's vengeance on the land, or to show that He was the healer of its sicknesses? To make clear that death is the certain wages of sin, or to affirm by acts and words that there is one who raiseth the dead? Which mission was the nobler in the old time? Which must be nobler for those that believe that God gave His only begotten Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved?—Condensed from *F. D. Maurice.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-14. Years had rolled away since Jehu's meeting with Elijah in the vineyard of Naboth. He was now high in the favour of Ahab's son, as captain of the host in the Syrian war. In that war of chariots and horses he had acquired an art little practised by the infantry of the ancient Israelites. He was known through the whole army and country for driving his horses like one out of his mind. The army which he commanded was at Ramoth-Gilead. That was still the point round which the interest of the Syrian war revolved. The king himself had been present at the siege, had been in personal danger, and had returned home to Jezreel to be cured of his wounds from the arrows of the Syrian archers. It was in his absence that a young man—said by tradition to be the futurer pophet

Jonah, son of the widow of Zarephath —arrived at the camp with a small flask in his hand. His garments were girt round him as of one travelling in haste, and his appearance was wild and excited as of a madman. From the midst of the captains he singled out Jehu. Once more there was a consecrated king of Israel. The oil of inauguration had been poured on the head of Jehu. He was to go forth "the anointed of the Lord" to exterminate the house of Ahab. It was as if a spark had been set to a train long prepared. There was not a moment's hesitation. The officers tore off their military cloaks and spread them under his feet where he stood on the top of the stairs leading down into the court. As he stood on this extempore throne, with no seat but the steps covered by the carpeting of the square pieces of cloth, they blew the well-known blast of the ram's horn which always accompanied the inauguration of a king of Israel. From this moment the course of Jehu is fixed. The destiny long brooding over him—the design perhaps raised in his own mind from the day when he had first met Elijah —is to be accomplished.—*Stanley's Jewish Church.*

Verses 1-10. **The service of God and the young.** I. The service of God is the highest service to which youth can be consecrated. II. The service of God teaches the young to reverence and obey the aged good. III. The service of God familiarises the youthful mind with the procedures of Divine justice and equity. IV. The service of God employs youth in enterprises involving great risk and difficulty. V. The service of God teaches youth to act with discretion, rapidity, and decision.

Verse 1. Old Elisha hath neither cottage nor foot of land, yet, sitting in an obscure corner, he gives orders for kingdoms, not by way of authority—this usurpation had been no less proud than unjust—but by way of message from the God of kings. Even a mean herald may go on a great errand. The prophets of the gospel have nothing to do but with spiritual kingdoms, to beat down the kingdoms of sin and Satan, to translate souls to the kingdom of heaven. He that renewed the life of the Shunammite's son must stoop to age: that block lies in his way to Jehu. The aged prophet employs a speedier messenger, who must also gird up his loins for haste. No common pace will serve us when we go on God's message; the loss of minutes may be unrecoverable. He is prodigal of his success that is slow in his execution.

Verse 3. How is it that of all the kings of the ten tribes none was ever anointed but Jehu? Is it that the God who would not countenance the erection of that usurped throne would countenance the alteration? Or is it that by this visible testimony of Divine ordination the courage of the Israelitish captains might be raised up to second the high and bold attempt of him whom they saw destined from heaven to rule?—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 4-10. **The prophet disciple.** I. *His mission.* He is one of the humblest in Samaria, a poor insignificant boy, and he carries a kingdom to Ramoth! How great the Lord appears in this incident, but also with what cutting irony He meets all the arrogance of the self-made gods of earth! II. *His obedience.* He raises no objections, though the task is hard for him. He is to go into a besieged city, to go before the generals of the army, to put his life and liberty at stake. Yet he goes with no sword at his side; without a companion he ventures into the army of the king to anoint another to be king. All human scruples and fears disappear before the duty of obedience. In obedience he does not fear, and lets not danger terrify him. III. *His fidelity.* He does no more and no less than he is demanded. He has a great commission entrusted to him, but he does not boast. He keeps the secret, and departs as he came. He does not care what may be thought of him, or what people may say, whether

they think him a mad fellow or not. So the apostles also carried the secrets of God out into the wide world, and had no other interest than that they might be found true.—*Lange.*

Verse 5. **The Divine message of mercy.** I. Is entrusted to the earnest and faithful, notwithstanding their youth. II. Is often delivered under circumstances of difficulty and peril. III. Is suited to all classes of society. IV. Is personal and direct in its application: "To *thee*, O captain!"

Verses 7-10. Oh, the sure, though the patient justice of the Almighty! Not only Ahab and Jezebel had been bloody and idolatrous, but Israel was drawn into the partnership of their crimes: all these shall share in the judgment. Elijah's complaint in the cave now receives this late answer. Hazeal shall plague Israel, Jehu shall plague the house of Ahab and Jezebel. Elisha's servant thus seconds Elisha's master. Ahab's drooping under the threat hath put off the judgment from his own days; now it comes and sweeps away his wife, his issue, and falls heavy upon his subjects. Please yourselves, O ye vain sinners! in the slow pace of vengeance; it will be neither less certain nor more easy for the delay; rather it were to pay for that leisure in the extremity.—*Bp. Hall.*

— The world of to-day will not hear that "the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries," and declares that this is only an Old Testament notion, and that the Gospel knows only one God, who is a God of love. It is true that God does not seek revenge, but he is a holy, and therefore a just God, who requites men as they have deserved, and repays each according to his conduct (Job xxxiv., ii.; Rom. ii. 6). A God without vengeance, who cannot and will not punish, is no God, but a divinity fashioned from one's thoughts. The same gospel that teaches that God is love, says also, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," and "Our God is a consuming fire." The same law which says that God is an avenging God towards His enemies, also says that "He is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."

Verse 7. **The Divine concern for the martyrs.** I. Sustains them in times of trial and suffering. II. Elevates them to sublime examples of heroism and devotion. III. Punishes their tormentors with terrible retribution.

— "The blood of thy servants." Listen! He has indeed permitted them to lay violent hands upon His servants, but He has not overlooked or forgotten it. Nothing cleaves more irresistibly up through the clouds than the voice of the blood of persecuted saints. Nothing is better adapted to pour oil upon the flames of the Divine wrath against the godless than the sighs which their cruelty forces from a child of God. The blood of the saints has often cried from earth to heaven, and what judgments it has called down! Let the persecutors of all centuries appear and bear witness. Nebuchadnezzer, Belshazzar, Herod, Agrippa, Nero, Inquisitors of Spain, the Louises of France, Charles IX.—bear witness all what a dangerous thing it is to lay hands upon the saints of the Most High! This is not the only instance where God has raised the destroying axe over a dynasty which was morally rotten. He often makes use of royal families which have fallen into moral decay for the discipline of nations, but the time never fails to come when He passes sentence of destruction upon them, and brings speedy ruin upon the condemned. A family tree does not stand firm in gilded parchments and registers: only when it is planted by the waters which flow from the sanctuary of God will it continue to flourish vigorously.—*Krumm.*

Verse 10. **Work for God.** 1. Should be entered upon with due preparation. 2. Should be done expeditiously. 3. Should be left to work its own results

Verse 11. "Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?" Religious zeal. I. Obtains its purest inspirations from the love of God and of His service. II. Often leads the messenger of God to adopt methods which are misunderstood by the world. III. Is regarded by the unbelieving and unspiritual as a species of insanity.

— So God's prophets were ever counted and called by the mad world, always beside itself in point of salvation (Jer. xxxix. 26; Hosea ix. 7; Acts xxvi. 24; 2 Cor. v. 13). These profane ruffians could not name such a one without a flout, because the prophets declaimed against their wickedness, and contemned the world's vanities which they so much esteemed. But though their tongues thus spake after the wicked guise of it, miscalling the prophet's innocency, yet their desire to know what he said and did, did abundantly show what credit they gave him secretly; and after, they made him king whom that fellow had anointed, to the hazard of their own lives. God giveth a secret authority to His despised servants, so as they which hate their persons, yet reverence their truth; even very scorners cannot but believe them.—*Trapp.*

Verse 12. If the generals, when they heard that God had anointed Jehu to be king, hastened, spread out their garments, and shouted, "Jehu is king," how much more should all shout Hosanna to Him whom God hath anointed with the Holy Ghost, and has seated Him at His right hand in heaven, who will rule until He has subdued all enemies under his feet.

Verse 13. Their readiness in throwing off their allegiance to Jehoram is something remarkable. But it was known that the house of Ahab was in the present generation doomed to extinction. This was a thing people were not likely to forget. It was known that Elisha, who had sent this man, was a commissioned prophet, authorised to declare the will of the Lord, who had reserved the right of appointing whom he saw fit to the kingdom. And it is probable that the military were dissatisfied with the rule of a house so completely under the influence of one bad woman, and the errors and crimes of which had first and last brought so much discredit upon the nation. Add to this, that in the absence of a fixed succession to a throne which so many aspiring adventurers have already won, loyalty sits but lightly upon the soldiery; and they are very prone to vote a popular commander into the throne when it becomes vacant, or even to make it vacant for him.—*Kitto.*

Verse 14. There are few persons in the sacred history who have been so variously judged as Jehu. To some he is a stirrer up of rebellion and a bloody despot; others see in him a pure and unimpeachable servant of the Lord. Both equally err, for both depart alike from what the sacred record declares, and all depends, especially in the case of Jehu, on allowing ourselves to be led simply by the record. If we restrict ourselves to what is said in this chapter, this much is certain, that he did not make himself king. There is not a word to justify the suspicion that he plotted and conspired before he was anointed king; on the contrary, the story shows clearly that the prophetical calling to be king surprised and astonished him, and also that his fellow-commanders knew nothing of it. He ought not, therefore, to be put in the same category with Baasha, Zimri, Shallum, Menakem, Pekah, and Hoshea, who, instigated by ambition, without authority and in self-will, took the royal power into their hands. He was called to be king by the prophet, by the name of Jehovah. The explanation of the selection of just this man as the instrument for the destruction of the house of Ahab, and for the uprooting of idolatry, is found in the fact that at that time there was scarcely a man who united, as he did, all the necessary qualifications. In the first place, Jehu was a decided opponent of idolatry, and of the abuses which were connected

with it (verse 22). He was a man of the greatest energy. Pushing onward with boldness and enterprise, decided and pitiless, he shrank back before no difficulty (verses 20, 24, 32). Moreover, he did not lack prudence or wisdom (verses 11, 15, 18). Finally, he stood high in the popular esteem as a military leader. We see from the joy with which his fellow-commanders caught up his nomination and anointment, and from the readiness with which they obeyed his commands, that he enjoyed their fullest confidence (verses 14-16). It is true that his subsequent conduct is fierce and soldier-like; that was the natural product of his character, calling, and education.—*Lange.*

— So much credit hath that mad fellow with these gallants of Israel, that upon his word they will presently adventure their lives and change the crown. God gives a secret authority to His despised servants, so as they which hate their person, yet reverence their truth; even very scorners cannot but believe them. If, when the prophets of the Gospel tell us of a spiritual kingdom, they be distrusted of those which profess to observe them, how shameful is the disproportion—how just shall their judgment be!—*Bp. Hall.*

— If we see here, and in the succeeding chapters, the horrors of revolution on the one hand, none the less do we see when and how revolution becomes a terrible necessity. All authority is a means, not an end. It is established, recognised, and obeyed because it serves those ends. Its rights and privileges are correlative with duties, obligations, and responsibilities, viz., to accomplish the objects for which it was created. Its claims to obedience stand and fall with its fidelity in fulfilling its trust. If it fails in this, if it goes farther, and in the pursuit of its selfish aims and the gratification of its own self-will, threatens to crush and ruin the very interests it was created to serve, the time comes when obedience ceases to be a virtue, and becomes complicity in a crime. In the absence of prophetical authority to fix the time and designate the leaders for renouncing allegiance, it is difficult to see who is to judge of these, save the nation whose interests are at stake.—*Editor of Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 15-37.

The Terrible Work of Revenge.

I. Is entered upon with prudence and decision. 1. *The avenger secures a powerful following.* "If it be your minds, let none tell it in Jezreel" (verse 15). This politic appeal to the army gained its purpose. The brother-officers of Jehu were fully committed to the new order of things, and there was no drawing back. With the army devoted to his cause, Jehu was prepared to carry out his work of vengeance without faltering. It is folly to attempt any enterprise involving risk and difficulty without the most careful and judicious preparation. 2. *The avenger acts with promptness and energy* (verses 16-19). Jehu mounts his chariot and drives towards Jezreel, determined to be the first to confront the deposed king. The messengers sent out by Joram are detained prisoners. Still uncertain of the purpose of Jehu, the two kings drive out of the city to meet him, little dreaming of the fate that awaited them; and there is surely something specially ominous in the fact, mentioned in the narrative with such severe and artless simplicity, that they "meet him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite" (verse 21). The rapidity and decisiveness of Jehu's movements gave no opportunity to his victims to protect themselves. They were at once placed in his power. The man of promptness and decision has the advantage in every enterprise.

II. Is committed to one who is every way fitted to carry it out. "The driving is the driving of Jehu, for he driveth furiously" (verse 20). In this one reference we have the key to Jehu's character, a man who having once made up his mind to a certain course, will pursue it with a wild, reckless, madcap energy, utterly indifferent to all sentiment and feeling. It was horrible work that Jehu had to do. An ordinary man would have recoiled from it with fear and loathing. Jehu was cautious, crafty, and perhaps slow in committing himself to a certain course of action; but having done so, he prosecuted it with a hot, hasty, and unrelenting energy, unmoved either by pity or fear. "He did not shrink from difficulties, did not hesitate at harsh means of accomplishing his purpose, did not feel pity in striking down those who stood in his way, did not leave behind him anything that might, at a later time, rise up to mar or overthrow his work. His is not a lovely character. It does not present the amiable virtues—patience, pity, mercy, kindness. It is not a character to be imitated in modern civilised life; neither ought it to be measured or judged by the standards of a society trained to peace and order, fearful of revolution and encased in law. In the providence of God such men are often raised up for great crises in church and state. The man is swallowed up in the movement. His personal virtues and faults are lost sight of in the stormy, tumultuous crises in which he lived. He was needed and was called; he responded and accomplished his calling well. That is his place in the history, and that is the judgment on his career."

III. Falls upon the leading representatives of the wickedness to be punished (verses 22-35). Joram, Ahaziah, Jezebel—a royal trio—representatives of the idolatrous curse that had blighted both Israel and Judah, and brought down the judgment of heaven. Jezebel, whose end was so ignominious, and which is described with such dramatic vigour, was at the roo o f the nation's apostasy, and her crimes hastened the catastrophe. Joram, though taking his part in war, as his wound testified, appears in general "in the light of an oriental monarch, indolent, careless, luxurious, fond of ease. His death fulfilled a malediction upon his father. Ahaziah seems to have been one of those weak men who float on in the direction which their education and family traditions have given them. He followed the family traditions down to the family ruin. The two kings appear to be to a great extent the victims of the sins of their ancestors; and as Jezebel had controlled Ahab, we are led back to her as the origin of all this individual, family, and national calamity. She was one of those strong, bold, wicked women who have played such important *roles* in history. By Ahab's marriage with this woman, the licentiousness of the worship of Baal and Astarte, the freedom of manners of the Phœnician court, the luxury and sensuality of the heathen nations, were imported into Israel. It became her aim to override and destroy all that was peculiar and national in Israel, but in so doing she was contravening all that belonged to and sustained God's plan for Israel in human history. She braved the conflict, and re-asserted it in her last hour; and she and her descendants went down in the catastrophe" (*Editor of Lange*). The stroke of God's vengeance never misses its object, and never mistakes its victim. The leaders of iniquity are sure to be smitten.

IV. Fulfils the Divine word with significant exactitude (verses 36, 37). Fifteen years had passed away since Elijah prophesied—"The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel" (1 Kings xxi. 23); and now the Divine word is fulfilled with such precision that the body of the proud, luxurious Jezebel is not recognizable—not a vestige is left but a few bones. "Though so great a woman by her birth, connexions, and alliances, she has not the honour of a

tomb. There was not even a solitary stone to say, *Here lies Jezebel!* not even a mound of earth to designate the place of her sepulture! Judgment is God's strange work; but when he contends, how terrible are His judgments!" Thrones totter and fall, but the word of the Lord abideth for ever.

LESSONS:—1. *The triumph of iniquity is short-lived.* 2. *Jehovah is slow to punish, but when he does so it is with terrible severity.* 3. *The threatenings of God should lead to repentance and reformation; if disregarded and defied, ruin is inevitable.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 15. Jehu is no less subtle than valiant. He knew that the notice of this unexpected change might work a busy and dangerous resistance. He therefore gives order that no messenger of the news may anticipate his personal execution, that so he might surprise Jehoram in his palace of Jezreel, whether tending his late wounds, or securely feasting his friends, and dreaming of nothing less than danger. Secresy is the safest guard of any design. Disclosed projects are either frustrated, or made needlessly difficult.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 17-20.—The minister of God's word, a watchman. 1. He occupies an elevated and conspicuous position. 2. He keeps a vigilant look-out. 3. He is quick to discern the signs of the times. 4. He is faithful in reporting what is good, and in warning of coming danger. 5. He has keen insight into character, and the tendency of human conduct.

Verse 17. There was usually in ancient times a watch-tower over the royal residence, where a man was always stationed, night and day, to keep a good look-out in all directions from which any sort of tidings might be expected. What he beheld that he deemed of any consequence, he declared below in the courts of the palace.

The *Agamemnon* of Æschylus opens with the soliloquy of such a watchman—

For ever thus? O keep me not, ye gods,
For ever thus, fixed in the lonely tower
Of Atreus' Palace, from whose height I gaze
O'er-watched and weary, like a night-dog still
Fixed to my post; meanwhile the rolling year
Moves on, and I my wakeful vigils keep
By the cold star-light sheen of spangled skies.

In the present case, the frequency of reports from the seat of war, and the king's desire for intelligence, naturally kept the attention of the watchman much in that direction.—*Kitto.*

Verse 20. Reckless drivers. "Like the driving of Jehu, for he driveth furiously." By the flash of that one sentence, we discover Jehu's character. He came with such speed, not merely because he had an errand to do, but because he was urged on by a headlong disposition, which had won him the name of a reckless driver, even among the watchmen. The chariot plunges until you almost expect the wheels to crash under it, or some of the princely party to be thrown out, or the horses to become utterly unmanageable. But he always goes so; and he becomes a type of that class of persons to be found in all the communities, who in worldly and religious affairs may be styled *reckless drivers.*

I. To this class belong all those who conduct their worldly affairs in a headlong way, without any regard to prudence or righteousness. Many a man sits in his pew on Sunday night, and sings *Rock of Ages*, and rolls up his eyes very piously, who, on coming out at the close of the service, shuts the pew-door and says, "Good-bye religion, I will be back next Sunday!" A religion that does not work all the

week, as well as on Sunday, is no religion at all. There are to-day in our midst, many of our best citizens who have come from affluence into straightened circumstances, because there was a partner in their firm, or a cashier in their bank, or an agent representing their house, or one of the largest creditors, who, like Jehu, the son of Nimshi, was a furious driver. Once in a while a swindler is arrested, and if the case be too notoriously flagrant, the culprit is condemned, but the officials having him in charge must take the express train, and get to Sing Sing in briefest time, or the governor's pardon gets there before him. We have feet of lightning when we get on the track of a woman who has stolen a paper of pins, or a freezing man who has abstracted a scuttle of coals; but when we go out in pursuit of some man who has struck down the interests of a hundred, and goes up along the Hudson to build his mansion, the whole city hangs on our skirts, crying, "Don't you hurt him!" If a teamster, passing down the street, dashes heedlessly along and runs down a child, the authorities catch him; but for the reckless commercial drivers, who stop not for the rights of others, and who dash on to make their fortunes over the heads of innocence, virtue, and religion—no chastisements. When I see in the community men with large incomes, but larger outgoes, rushing into wildest undertakings, their pockets filled with circulars about gold in Canada, and lead in Missouri, and fortunes everywhere, launching out in expenditures to be met by the thousands they expect to make, with derision dashing across the path of sober men, depending upon their industry and honour for success, I say, "Here he comes, the son of Nimshi, driving furiously."

II. Now you may, in worldly affairs, be cautious, true, honourable, and exemplary; but all those who are speeding towards eternity without preparation—flying with the years, and the months, and the weeks, and the days, and the moments, and the seconds, towards an unalterable destiny, yet uncertain as to where they speed, are *reckless drivers*. What would you think of a stage-driver with six horses and twenty passengers, in the midnight, when it is so dark that you cannot see your hand before your face, dashing at full run over bridges, and along by dangerous precipices? Such a man is prudent, compared with one who, amid the perils of this life, dashes on towards an unknown eternity, not knowing where he goes. If, in driving, you come to the forks of a road, and one goes to the right, and the other to the left, you stop and make enquiry as to which road you ought to take. To-night, you have come to the forks of a road. One leads to heaven, and the other to hell. Which road will you take? I see multitudes of people who do not even stop at the forks to make enquiry. The coursers behind which they go are panting with the speed, nostrils distended, foam dropping from the bit and whitening the flanks, but still urged on with lash, and shout, and laughter; the reins undrawn, the embankments unwatched, the speed unnoticed. Alas, for the reckless drivers! They may after awhile see the peril and seize the reins, and lay back with all their might, and put on the brakes, and cry for help until the hands are numb, and their eyes start from their sockets, and the breath stops, and the heart chills, as over the rocks they plunge, courser and chariot and horsemen tumbling in long resounding crash of ruin.

III. Some are drawn along by sinful pleasures—a wild team that ran away with all who have persisted in riding behind them. Once fully under way, no sawing of the bit can stop them. They start at every sudden sight or sound, and where it needs a slow step and great care, they go with bound terrific. Their eyes are a-flame with terrors, and their hoofs red with the blood of men whose life they have dashed out, and, what is worse, the drivers scourge them into more furious speed. We come out and tell

them of dangers ahead, but with jeer they pass on. The wild team smoke with the speed, and their flying feet strike fire, and the rumbling of swift wheels over rotten bridges that span awful chasms is answered by the rumbling of the heavens, "Because I called and ye refused, and stretched out my hands and no man regarded, therefore I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh!" When this world gets full power over a man, he might as well be dead—he is dead! When Sisera came into the house of Jael, she gave him something to drink, and got him asleep on the floor. Then she took a peg from the side of her tent, and a mallet, and drove the peg through the brain of Jael into the floor. So the world feeds a man, and when it has him sound asleep, strikes his life out. Perhaps there are some who say, "Would God I could stop my bad practices! But I cannot stop. I know that I am on the wrong road, and that I have been a reckless driver; but I try to rein in my swift appetites, yet they will not heed." I tell such that there is an Almighty hand which can pull back these wild racers. He whose beck the stars answer, and at whose mandate the chariots of heaven come and go, is more than a master for these temptations. Helpless yourself, and unable to guide these wild coursers, give Jesus Christ the reins; mighty to save unto the uttermost. Better stop now. Some years ago near Princetown, New Jersey, some young men were skating on a pond around an air-hole, and the ice began to break in. Some of them stopped, but a young man said, "I am not afraid, give us one round more!" He swung nearly round, when the ice broke, and not until next day was his lifeless body found.—*Talmage.*

— Impetuosity of disposition. 1. A valuable power when used in a good cause. 2. Should be under control without being utterly crushed. 3. Absolutely necessary to accomplish certain results. 4. May hurry one into dangerous excesses.

— Dilatory and careless people do not accomplish anything. Only diligent and energetic persons succeed. Test thyself to see what spirit moves thee. The right motive power is the Holy Spirit, which never guides to folly. One may conduct spiritual affairs and manage the concerns of the kingdom of God with folly, want of judgment, and heat (Rom. x. 2). Those only are children of God who are moved by the spirit of God (Rom. viii. 14).—*Osiander.*

Verses 21-37. A terrible day of judgment. 1. It comes with awful suddenness. 2. It brings destruction to three notable monarchs when they little expected. 3. It is irresistible, and leaves no possible way of escape. 4. It fulfils and confirms the Divine threatenings.

Verses 22, 23. Wicked tyrant! What speakest thou of peace with men, when thou hast thus long waged war with the Almighty? That cursed mother of thine hath nursed thee with blood and trained thee up in abominable idolatries. Thou art not more hers than her sin is thine; thou art polluted with her spiritual whoredoms and enchanted with her hellish witchcrafts. Now that just God, whom thou and thy parents have so heinously despised, sends thee by me this last message of His vengeance, which, while he spake, his hand is drawing up that deadly arrow which shall cure the former wounds with a worse. Too late now doth wretched Jehoram turn his chariot and flee and cry, Treason, O Ahaziah! There was treason before, O Jehoram! Thy treason against the majesty of God is now revenged by the treason of Jehu against thee.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 22. "Is it peace?" So it is to-day also: a false peace is demanded of those who are sent to make known the stern truth, in order that hoary evils may not be exposed. Those who have not true peace, generally want an external, shameful

peace at any price (Ezek. xiii. 16). Ask thyself first of all, "Is there peace in thy heart?" and seek peace from Him who is our peace (Eph. ii. 14). There can be no lasting peace where there is apostasy from the living God and His word; there licentiousness, injustice, tyranny, strife, and war, with all their attendant miseries and horrors, must come. Though His sword rests for a time, yet it does not rest in its scabbard.—*Lange.*

Verses 23-29. **The death of the kings of Israel and Judah.** It was sudden, unforeseen, and fell upon them in their security and blindness. The proverb applies to Ahaziah: "Hunt with the fox, and you will be hung with him." Refrain from bad companions, if thou wouldst not be punished with them. The one is thrown upon Naboth's field, and left without a grave; the other is brought indeed to the sepulchre of his fathers, but what is the use of a royal sepulchre to him who has lost his soul?—*Wurt. Summ.*

Verses 25, 26. **The inflexible exactitude of retribution.** 1. Is not affected by the changes of time. 2. Is the operation of a Divine law which is startlingly minute in its application. 3. Makes the place of the sin the place of the punishment. "I will requite thee in this plat." 4. Should lead the evil-doer to pause and think.

— How just are the judgments of God! It was in the field of Naboth wherein Jehoram met with Jehu; that very ground called to him for blood. And now this new avenger remembers that prophecy which he heard out of the mouth of Elijah in that very place, following the heels of Ahab, and is careful to perform it. Little did Jehu think, when he heard that message of Elijah, that his hands should act it. Now, as zealous of accomplishing the word of a prophet, he gives charge to Bidkar his captain that the bleeding carcase of Jehoram should be cast upon that very plat of Naboth. O Naboth's blood well paid for! Ahab's blood is licked by dogs in the very place where those dogs licked Naboth's.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 25. Jehu remembers, and in substance repeats, the word of the Lord by Elijah (1 Kings xxi. 19, 29), and, conscious that he himself is the minister of judgment, he fulfils the word of the Lord. "This," says Kitto, "completes the first act of this awful tragedy, which reads like the old Greek dramas—but far less old than this—of accomplished fate. The appointed executer of the doom was himself the witness of its being imposed. All is complete."

Verse 27. **The danger of evil associations.** 1. Begets a distaste to that which is good. 2. Leads to apostasy from God, and to excesses of wickedness at one time indignantly deemed impossible. 3. Results in suffering and premature death.

Verses 30-37. What does the frightful end of Jezebel teach? 1. The transitoriness and nothingness of human might and glory. Jezebel relies upon her might. Before her the people tremble. She controlled and directed three kings. She raged against all who did not submit unconditionally to her will. Now she lies, thrown down from her height, like dung upon the field, so that no one could say, "That is the great and mighty queen Jezebel." 2. The certainty of Divine retribution. Jezebel was an enemy of the living God and of His word. She seduced old and young to apostasy. She persecuted all who still held firmly to Jehovah. Her terrible end proves that such a temper is certainly punished. Her end has no parallel in Israelitish history. It calls aloud to all unto this day, "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness" (Jer. xxii. 13), and it is a pledge of the truth of this assertion, "Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked (Ps. xci. 8).—*Lange.*

Verses 30-35. Jezebel: the ignominious fall of pride and beauty. 1. The proud queen, defiant to the last, decks herself with ornaments, not hoping to captivate the impetuous Jehu with the charms of her beauty, but to awe him into submission by her imperious assumption of royal state and authority. 2. Her untamed, undaunted spirit is evident in the stinging reproof she uttered to Jehu as soon as he came within earshot, and which she seemed almost to hiss between her clenched teeth—"Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" This is her last glory, to remind her enemy of the fate of one who had, like him, usurped the royal power, and killed his king, and, as Kitto says, "to cast one bitter burning word upon the head of the destroyer, such as should haunt and scorch him all his life." But Jehu was not the man to be intimidated by words, though such fierce expressive words, and from the lips of such a woman. 3. She is instantly deserted and betrayed by those she considered her obsequious and obedient slaves. At the word of command, which they saw it was dangerous to disobey, her decked and painted body is ignominiously flung out of the window, dashed to the ground, and the last spark of life crushed out of it by the horses and chariot of the furious driver, the blood of the royal victim splashing against the wall, and sprinkling the horses. "This is one of the most terribly vivid and fearful pictures in all the annals of tragedy." 4. Her body is left to be devoured by the pariah dogs, is denied even common sepulture, and, in a short time—quicker than it takes the king to banquet—a few bones are all that is left of the once imperious, queenly, but cruel and idolatrous Jezebel.

—The tidings of the revolution under Jehu, and of the death of Joram, spread with the greatest rapidity throughout Jezreel, and quickly reached the ears of the haughty Jezebel. One would suppose that, on hearing it, she would have trembled with terror, and gone to hide herself in some dark recess of the palace; but her fierce, masculine, vindictive spirit asserts its pre-eminence to the very last, and if she has to perish with the rest of Ahab's house, she resolves to die the regal mistress she had lived.—*Whedon.*

Verse 30. How accurately this description fits many of her sex. The highest occupation they can conceive of is to adorn themselves, to conquer, and produce effects. Thou fool! If God demands thy soul of thee to-day, what shall all paint and powder upon the face avail before Him who tries the heart and the reins? Can velvet and silk cover thine inner stains (Isa. iii. 16)? There could be no sterner reproof of vanity, pride, and coquetry, and no more severe warning to take to heart the apostle's words (1 Peter iii. 3) than the fate of Jezebel. *Lange.*

— Who would not have looked that Jezebel, hearing of this bloody end of her son and pursuit of her ally, and the fearful proceedings of this prosperous conspiracy, should have put herself into sackcloth and ashes; and now, finding no means either of defence or escape, should have cast herself into such a posture of humiliation as might have moved the compassion of Jehu? Her proud heart could not suddenly learn to stoop; rather she recollects her high spirits, and, instead of humbling her soul by repentance, and addressing herself for an imminent death, she paints her face, and, as one that vainly hopes to daunt the courage of an usurper by the sudden beams of majesty, she looks out and thinks to fright him with the challenge of a traitor, whose either mercy or justice could not be avoided. Extremity finds us such as our peace leaves us. Our last thoughts are spent upon that we most care for. Those that have regarded their face more than their soul, in their latter end are more taken up with desire of seeming fair than being happy. It is no marvel if a heart, obdured by the custom of sin, shut up gracelessly. Counterfeit beauty agrees well with inward uncleanness.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 31. Who can be more perverse

and pitiful than a man who boasts and puts on airs in the very face of death, and passes out of the world with abuse and insults against God, instead of begging for pity, and crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Jezebel, who murdered the prophets, and Naboth, who revolted against the Lord of heaven and earth, calls Jehu a murderer and a rebel. The blind and stubborn human heart always finds in others just those sins of which it is itself guilty in a far higher degree.—*Lange.*

Verse 34. This scene of hilarity and cheer in the midst of such fearful bloodshed makes one shudder. But the minister of doom to Ahab's guilty house must needs be such a one as Jehu. Tenderness and sympathy would unfit the avenger of blood for his work of death. Not till after his feast does Jehu reflect that so much royalty and greatness have fallen. He had left the mangled corpse of the once mighty Jezebel on the mounds of offal outside the gate, a prey to the dogs which in the East ever prowl about such spots.—*Whedon.*

Verse 35. **The vanity of human greatness.** I. Its external splendours fade. II. Its wicked and ambitious schemes are overthrown. III. Its boasted and bewitching beauty is represented at last by a few revolting fragments.

— In illustration of this shocking end of the corpse of Jezebel, it remains to remark that the more than half-wild street dogs of the East, living upon their own resources, and without owners, soon make a rapid clearance of the flesh of dead bodies left exposed, whether of human creatures or beasts. An Eastern traveller, describing the remains of some human bodies that had been devoured by dogs, says: "The only portion of the several corpses I noticed that remained entire and untouched, were the bottoms of the feet, and the insides of the hands; a proof of the rooted antipathy the dog has to prey upon the human hands and feet." Dr. Thomson supposes that the dogs under Jezebel's palace may have been taught to devour the wretched victims of her cruelty, in which case the retribution would be remarkably striking.

— The dogs have anticipated Jehu in his purpose, and have given Jezebel a living tomb, more ignoble than the worst of the earth. Only the skull, hands, and feet remain—the skull, which was the roof of all her wicked devices; the hands and feet, which were the executioners—these shall remain as the monuments of those shameful exequies, that future times, seeing these fragments of a body, might say: "The dogs were worthy of the rest." Thus Jezebel is turned to dung and dog's meat, Elijah is verified, Naboth is revenged, Jezreel is purged, Jehu is zealous, and, in all, God is just.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 36, 37. **The infallibility of the Divine word.** 1. Seen in the precision with which its threatenings are fulfilled. 2. Is acknowledged and declared by those who are called to carry out its threats. 3. Is as precise and full in the fulfilment of its promises of blessing.

— The story of the end of Jezebel is given with particular detail, because therein the prophet's threat was fulfilled with especial frightfulness. As the sin of the house, Ahab was represented to the fullest extent in Jezebel, the originator and patroness of idolatry, so her terrible end forms the crisis of the Divine punishment. Ahaziah is fatally wounded, and dies in a strange place. Joram falls dead, pierced through the heart; but is thrown upon the field of Naboth, and not buried. Jezebel is thrown down from the window by her own attendants; as she lies weltering in her own blood, she is trodden under foot by horses, and the corpse lies unburied, "like dung upon the fields." She appears here, in her last moments, such as she had ever been—proud and impudent—arrogant and domineering—defiant and insolent. She places herself at the window, painted and grandly dressed, and presumes upon

her assumed majesty. Instead of recognising in the judgment which is falling upon her house the just recompense for her misdeeds, instead of sueing for grace, she, who had shed so much innocent blood, and had exalted herself against the God of Israel, insults the instrument of the Divine vengeance as a murderer and a traitor, demands that he shall submit to her, and threatens him, relying upon her imagined power, with destruction if he persists. Just here, judgment overtakes her; her nearest attendants forsake the hated queen, and hurl her down from her position. She does not reach the rest of the grave, and remains, even in death, marked with infamy for all time—a proof of the truth of the words: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."—*Lange.*

CHAPTER X.

THE FALL OF BAAL.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Seventy sons—*i. e., descendants*, sons grandsons, &c. The rulers of Jezreel—"Jezreel" has no authoritative place in the text. The LXX. suggests "Samaria," and the *Vulgate* supplies *civitatis;* other translators have changed יִזְרְעֶאל (Jezreel) into יִשְׂרָאֵל (Israel). Keil suggests that "the rulers of Jezreel" mean "the supreme court officials of the royal house of Ahab." Them that brought up Ahab's children—These אֹמְנִים are the guardians and educators of the royal princes of Ahab.

Verse 2. This letter—It is full of satire. Jehu is so sure he is possessor of the throne that he tantalizes those he addresses by urging them to select a rival! Verse 2. Your master's sons, &c.—This "*master*" meant Joram. Verse 5. He that was over the house—אֲשֶׁר, perfect.

Verse 11. So Jehu slew all—How remarkable this honest record in God's book! The cunning dissembler wished to impress "all the people" (v. 9) with the idea that the chief men in charge of Ahab's house had conspired to murder these seventy descendants of Ahab, and then had hypocrisy enough to quote Elijah's prophecy as being fulfilled in the extirpation of Ahab's house. But neither his dissembling nor his religious cant hinders the plain record that "*Jehu slew all.*" Verse 13. Brethren of Ahaziah—Rather, blood relations—step-brothers, nephews, cousins—for Jehoram died when he was forty years old, and it is incredible that he could have forty-two sons. To salute the children of the king—*i.e.*, as they in their ignorance of Jehu's conspiracy and murders supposed, *Joram;* and the queen meant the queen-mother, *Jezebel.* Verse 16. My zeal for the Lord—Ambitious blood-thirstiness rather; but a villain knows how to use religious phrases, as the devil did (Matt. iv. 6). Verse 19. But Jehu did it in subtilty—His subterfuge for the destruction of Baal's priests and votaries must not be regarded as proof of Jehu's attachment and loyalty to Jehovah, but because he knew these priests and prophets were adherents to Ahab's dynasty, and would be unfriendly to his own. He used religion for his own guilty ends, as verse 29 proves. Verse 22. Vestments for all the worshippers of Baal—These priestly vestments were white robes, and kept within the temple by the master of the wardrobe; as, indeed, the holy garments of the priests of Israel were kept in the temple at Jerusalem. Verse 26. Images out of the house of Baal—See Note on 1 Kings xiv. 23. Verse 27. A draught-house—A sink or filth-closet, in order to cover the scene with infamy and detestation. Verse 29. The golden calves that were in Bethel—Political reasons led to the origin of calf-worship (1 Kings xii. 28), and doubtless for political reasons Jehu continued it. Verse 32. To cut Israel short—Instead of לְהַצּוֹת, *to cut off from*, the Targum and others read לְקַצּוֹף, *to be enraged, wrath.* In all the coasts of Israel—*i.e.*, along the entire frontier, the land beyond Jordan belonging to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-17.

ZEAL IN EXECUTING DIVINE JUDGMENTS.

I. Is not deficient in resources for accomplishing its purpose (verses 1-11). Joram, Ahaziah, and Jezebel have fallen, but the Divine vengeance, which had so long and patiently slumbered, will not have finished its work of retribution till every member of Ahab's guilty house is brought to judgment. Jezreel was in the power of Jehu, and with his characteristic promptitude, he seeks to get Samaria in his grasp, and wreak his vengeance on the children of Ahab there. His artifice in writing to the rulers in Samaria to set up a child of Ahab's as king, and fight for him, is full of both irony and menace—of irony because he knew how unlikely it was that they would champion the cause of a fallen house, known to be doomed of God, and of menace, as it seemed to involve a demand, either to surrender, or else prepare for the worst. Bähr paraphrases it thus:—"I am king, but if ye, who have in your possession the chariots and horses and arms, are desirous of placing a prince of the house of Ahab on the throne, you thereby begin a war with me." They submitted; and it is a melancholy evidence of the utter demoralisation caused by the prevailing idolatry, that the guardians, without the least show of defence, coolly massacred the seventy sons of Ahab, many of them young and tender, who had been committed to their care, and sent their heads to the blood-thirsty Jehu. By this stratagem it would seem that the slaughter of these descendants of Ahab was charged upon the rulers of Samaria, and that Jehu gained his object without the odium of the guilt. Not so. Jehu takes the full responsibility, and regards it as a fulfilment of the Divine word (verses 9-11). The man fired with zeal to do a work which is so congenial to his own taste and aims, knows how to make the best of his power and opportunities.

II. May excite a love of slaughter which tempts it to exceed the limits of its original commission (verses 12-14). Jehu moves on to Samaria to take possession of the capital of his newly-acquired kingdom, and every stage of his progress is marked with blood. When the thirst for blood is once aroused, it is not readily slaked. "On the way he met a gay and gallant party of princes from Judah, proceeding on a visit to the court of Israel, whom the tidings of the revolution had not reached, so rapid had been Jehu's movements. These, in his still unslaked-thirst for blood, he ordered to be slain on the spot; and it is quite possible that, like the early Moslem conquerors, he sincerely thought that, while performing these and other atrocities, which were greatly beyond his commission, though under cover of it, he was doing God service, and that he suffered not himself to perceive that he was following to a greater extent the ferocious instincts of his nature, or that sanguinary excitement under which he laboured, combined with an undercurrent of selfish policy, which taught him that, after such a beginning as he had made, the more complete the riddance he accomplished of all the adherents of the house of Ahab—whether from sympathy of principle, or from alliance of blood—the more thoroughly the power of future reaction would be weakened. Jezebel's question—"Had Zimri peace when he slew his master?" rang constantly in his ears; and he was answering it after his hard fashion, which seemed to say: "Zimri had no peace, because he slew *only* his master; I slay more that I may have peace."—(*Kitto*). The intoxication of slaughter is a dangerous symptom in any nature, and will soon hurry one beyond the bounds of duty and justice.

III. Finds sympathy and encouragement in those who fully believe in the righteousness of the judgment (verses 15, 16). Here Jehu comes across a figure who might have reminded him of Elijah himself. It was Jehonadab, the son of Rechab—that is, the son of the "Rider," an Arab chief of the Kenite tribe, who was the founder, or second founder, of one of those Nazarite communities which had grown up in the kingdom of Israel, and which, in this instance, combined a kind of monastic discipline with the manners of the Bedouin race, from whom they were descended. It seems that he and Jehu were already known to each other. The king knew the stern tenacity of purpose that distinguished Jehonadab and his tribe. The hand was grasped in a clasp which was not afterwards parted. The king lifted him up to the edge of the chariot, apparently to whisper into his ear the first indication of the religious revolution which he had determined to make with the political revolution already accomplished. Side by side with the king, the austere hermit sat in the royal chariot as he entered the capital of Samaria, the warrior in his coat of mail, the ascetic in his haircloth (*Stanley*). Jehonadab had probably mourned over the prevailing idolatry, and hearing of what Jehu had done and said, he recognised in him a minister of Jehovah, to execute judgment on the wicked house of Ahab, and went forth to meet him, and declare that his heart was with him in this ministry of judgment. To have the sympathy and approval of such a man would be no small advantage to Jehu; and one does not know how far Jehonabab restrained him from excesses into which his impulsive nature might have driven him. It is an unspeakable benefit to any cause when zeal is at once encouraged and controlled. Even the fierce minister of Divine judgment is relieved when the terrible responsibility of his action is shared by a congenial and sympathizing companion.

IV. Persists in fully carrying out the Divine command (verse 17). Jehu was commissioned to destroy the whole house of Ahab, and he rested not till he had done in Samaria what he had done in Jezreel—put to death all the members of the doomed house. It was customary in the East, from the earliest times, for the founder of a new dynasty to put to death, not only the deposed monarch, but also his descendants and relatives—especially all the males—and we have several examples of this in these books of Kings (1 Kings xv. 29; xvi. 11; 2 Kings xxv. 7). Jehu, therefore, did not commit an unheard of crime, but followed, in this respect, the example of other founders of new dynasties, though there was in his case the solemn charge and warrant from Jehovah. A zealous nature is restless until the work committed to it is finished, and finished with all fidelity of detail. The marvel is that such strong, fiery spirits do not oftener exceed their commission and plunge into deeper crimes. Naturalists tell us that, among birds and butterflies, the swiftest, strongest flyers approach man much nearer than those with weaker wings, feeling confident that they can dart away from any threatened danger; and this misplaced confidence brings them into the net of the collector. How often has a confidence similarly inspired, and similarly misplaced, brought a strong ardent nature to the very brink of some terrible excess. How few can do just as much, and no more, than he is authorised to do!

LESSONS:—1. *It is no enviable office to be the executioner of Divine vengeance.* 2. *There are natures to whom the work of slaughter is congenial.* 3. *If so much zeal is shown in carrying out the Divine judgments, with how much eagerness should the Divine mercy be proclaimed!*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-7. Idolatry: its emasculating and degrading tendency. I. It has not the courage to defend the interests of its best patron but trembles with fear before the ambiguous threat of a usurper (verses 1-4). II. It makes a cowardly and humiliating submission (verse 5). III. Without even a remonstrance it surrenders its guardianship over lives it had pledged itself to protect and educate (verse 6). IV. It does not hesitate to commit the cruellest and most infamous crimes (verse 7).

— Moral decline among the highest ranks of a nation generally proceeds from a corrupt court which sets the fashion. As is the master, so is the servant. He who has the power in his hands always finds instruments among the great and those of high rank who shrink back from no demand which is made upon them, however much it may conflict with honour and duty. Those who no longer fear God, must fear men. Fear of men may become the cause of the greatest crimes.—*Lange*

Verse 1. The plentiful issue of princes is no small assurance to the people. Ahab had sons enough to furnish the thrones of all the neighbouring nations—to maintain the hopes of succession to all times. How secure did he think the perpetuation of his posterity when he saw seventy sons from his own loins. Neither was this royal issue trusted either to weak walls or to one roof; but to the strong bulwarks of Samaria, and therein to the several guards of the chief peers. It was the wise care of their parents not to have them obnoxious to the danger of a common miscarriage, but to order their separation, so as one may rescue the other from the peril of assault. Had Ahab and Jezebel been as wise for their souls as they were for their seed, both had prospered.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Though a large family of children is a blessing of God, yet we must not rely upon them, or be self-willed on that account, as if the family could not die out; but we must fear God, must not stain ourselves with sin against our consciences, and must bring up children in the fear of God, else He will take them away, and destroy the entire family.

Verse 5. **Unconditional submission.** I. Unjustifiable when it involves a greater wrong than continued resistance. II. Should not be made till every other expedient is first exhausted. III. Evidence of a weak and cowardly spirit. IV. May involve irreparable disgrace and ruin. V. Is always legitimate when made to the King of Heaven.

— Well may Jehu think—These men which are thus disloyal to their charge cannot be faithful to me; it is their fear that draws them to this observation. Were they not cowards, they would not be traitors to their princes, subjects to me. I may use their hands, but I will not trust them. It is a thankless obedience that is grounded upon fear. There can be no true fidelity without love and reverence. Neither is it other betwixt God and us. If, out of a dread of hell, we be officious, who shall thank us for these respects to ourselves?—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 6, 7. Here we have an example of unfaithful tutors, governors, and friends, who look in their actions not to the interests of the orphans, but to their own advantage, and let the orphans and their cause be ruined. As Jehu nevertheless destroyed them all, so will the just God also bring upon the heads of false friends and trustees all the unfaithfulness which they inflict upon orphans; therefore let such be warned against all violation of their trust. How they probably promised with all zeal to guard the life, the honour, and the rights of these princes. Now they themselves become their murderers. Let no man trust the golden words of him who fears man more than he fears God. Unfaithfulness ruins those who practise it. Though the crime which these men

perpetrated against their wards could hardly occur in our day, yet instructors and guardians are not wanting who become murderers of the souls of their pupils, in that they mislead them by example and precept into apostasy from the living God, and disbelief in His holy word, instead of educating them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. What is the worth of all the friendship, favour, and trust of this world? It is like a tree in soft, loose ground, which, so long as thou holdest it aright, covers thee pleasantly with its shadow; but which, when the storm roars through its top, and it is overthrown, no longer takes account of thee, but crushes thee in its fall.—*Lange.*

Verse 7. No doubt among so many sons of Ahab some had so demeaned themselves that they had won zealous professions of love from their guardians. What tears, what entreaties, what conjurations must here needs have been! What have we done, O ye peers of Israel, that we deserve this bloody measure! We are the sons of Ahab, therefore have ye hitherto professed to observe us. What change is this? Why should that which hath hitherto kept you loyal now make you cruel? Is this the reward of the long peaceable government of our father? Are these the trophies of Ahab's victories against Benhadad, Jehoram's against Hazael? If we may not reign, yet at least let us live; or, if we must die, why will your hands be imbrued in that blood which ye had wont to term royal and sacred? Why will ye of tutors turn murderers? All pleas are in vain that are deafened with their own fears. Perhaps these expostulations might have fetched some dews of pity from the eyes, and kisses from the lips of these unfaithful tutors, but cannot prevent the stroke of death. These crocodiles weep upon those whom they must kill; and if their own sons had been in the place of Ahab's, doubtless they had been sacrificed to the will of a usurper, to the parents' safety. It is ill relying upon timorous natures: upon every occasion those crazy reeds will break and run into our hands. How worthy were Ahab and Jezebel of such friends! They had been ever false to God; how should men be true to them? They had sold themselves to work wickedness, and now they are requited with a mercenary fidelity. For a few lines have these men sold all the heads of Ahab's posterity. Could ever the policy of Jezebel have reached so far as to suspect the possibility of extirpation of so ample an issue, in one night, by the hands of her trustiest subjects?—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 8. This cutting off of heads in collective masses, and making them into heaps, is and has been frightfully common in the East, and an Oriental familiar with blood and beheading from his cradle would read this portion of Scripture with little, if any, of the disgust and horror, and certainly with none of the surprise, with which it inspires us. After a battle, or a massacre, or the rout of a band of robbers, the heads are, as in the present instance, heaped up pyramidally, face outward, on each side the palace gates; and the builder of this horrid pile, if a man of taste and fancy, usually reserves a picturesque head, such as one with a fine long beard, to form the crown of his handiwork. Indeed, we have it on credible authority, that these men make little scruple of taking off the head of a bystander for the purpose, if they find not one in their stock equally becoming for the apex of the pile. Nothing in the East so much shocks a European as the frightful cheapness of human life, and with it of human heads. In Persia, the king has not seldom been known to express his displeasure at a town or village by demanding from it a pyramid of heads of given dimensions.—*Kitto.*

Verse 9. "Who slew all these?" The terrible havoc of sin. I. The fruitful source of suffering and misery. II. The instigator of anarchy and confusion in the family, the court, the nation, the universe. III. Provides the ghastly harvests of death.

Verses 9, 10. He wished the people to understand that in this work of blood, there were other ministers of Divine judgment besides himself. Most commentators explain these words as the language of sarcasm or irony, and suppose that Jehu either intended to involve them in the odium and guilt of this slaughter, or at least to keep them in ignorance of the fact that he had himself given orders for their slaughter. But this is altogether unnecessary and unauthorised by anything that appears in the text. Doubtless what Jehu had done towards this massacre was well known to all the people of Jezreel. He had, indeed, in a certain sense, ordered it, but yet in such a way as to involve the nobles, elders, and guardians in the guilt as much as himself. Their ready and prompt obedience in beheading these seventy persons was, perhaps, hardly expected by Jehu; and when he saw it, he at once began to feel that he was comparatively guiltless of their blood. Jehu wishes them to understand that these massacres are no works of private revenge, but a most signal fulfilling of Jehovah's word by the prophet Elijah (1 King xxi. 19-29). Strange that the man who so clearly recognised his mission as a minister of Divine judgment, utterly failed to see that, by cleaving to the sins of Jeroboam, he exposed himself to the same judgment, and that sooner or later Divine righteousness would "avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu."—*Whedon.*

Verse 10. **The righteous judgments of God.** 1. May be wrought out by the basest villanies of man. 2. Are brought about by persistence in disobedience and sin. 3. Impress the most obdurate with awe. 4. Should lead to humiliation and repentance.

Verses 12-14. **A thirst for slaughter.** 1. A dangerous appetite to indulge. 2. May impel to unnecessary cruelty. 3. Is indifferent to the number of its victims. 4. May be used as an instrument for inflicting deserved punishment.

Verse 15. **The right state of the heart.** Whatever professions of kindness and friendship we receive from men, their whole value depends on their agreement with the sentiment of the heart. We admit this so uniformly, that there is nothing so detestable as insincerity. The most friendly smiles, the most engaging attentions, become the objects of aversion when seen to be separated from the heart. When the base tinsel, which had given currency to the counterfeit coin, is worn off, we cast the piece away, notwithstanding the correctness of Cæsar's image and superscription impressed on it, and hold its utterer as a deceiver and cheat. Nothing is so thoroughly contemptible as hypocrisy, when once the mask falls off. If we exact this sincerity from each other—and this is what Jehu required from Jehonadab—how much more strictly may we not expect that it should be required from us by the all-seeing God! He claims the heart in all its principles and feelings. "He searches the heart, and tries the reins." He regulates his present proceedings towards us by the state of our heart, and by this will He judge us at the last day.

I. **If the state of our hearts be right, then they will be right with God.** The greatest idea that can be presented to our mind is that of God. He is not a distant being, unconnected with us, unrelated to us; and the state of our hearts towards Him must always be either right or wrong. Every sentiment we cherish contains in it, as to Him, some positive good or evil.

1. *A heart truly right with God implies that we venerate him.* How little of this is expressed, or even felt, on earth! Yet in Heaven, where all hearts are right, the seraphim veil their faces, and all living beings fall prostrate before His throne. When, therefore, we are conscious of His presence, when we walk as under His inspection, fear His displeasure more than the frowns of the world, and, bowing before His Majesty with lowliness of mind, give unto Him the

honour due unto His name, then only are our hearts right with him. 2. *A heart truly right with God implies that we entirely submit ourselves to him.* The very word "God," is a name of dominion, and never be it forgotten that He to whom it belongs has a supreme will concerning us. There cannot be a sadder spectacle than a heart wrestling with its Maker's will; but when we recognise His will as our only rule, when we keep this before us as our supreme law, regarding it as the light and guide of our conduct, when we acknowledge His sovereignty in providence, take our place in society as He appoints, submit to His dispensations, and, even in the greatest afflictions, even when nature agonizes, meekly bow, like Him in the garden, and say: "Not my will, but thine be done," then is our heart right with God. 3. *A heart truly right with God implies that, by the cultivation of a devotional spirit, we maintain a sacred intercourse with Him.* Prayer and praise are the great instruments of the fellowship of our spirits with God, and illapses of light, and love, and moral power, are the returns which the condescension of God makes to them. Ever since created intelligencies existed, to desire good from God, to receive supplies of it from Himself, to be devoutly grateful, and to express their love—so far as it can be expressed—in praises, has been the Heaven of happy spirits. It is the Heaven even of earth, the only one to be enjoyed, and which all may enjoy. How dead the heart which has no intercourse with Heaven! True joy is a stranger there, and all is darkness and sin. Barren and unwatered, it bears no fruit of either righteousness or peace.

II. **If our hearts be right, they are right with Christ.** Till this be the case, the heart cannot even be right with God. Some have attempted, indeed, to produce a state of mind, reverential, submissive, and devotional, without respect to Christ; but the attempt has been vain. That our heart be right with Christ is the foundation of all religion. 1. *It is so when it accepts His sacrifice as the only ground on which to claim the remission of sins.* How many are there that are not, in this respect, right with Christ! One depends on his own virtues, another on his benevolence and charities; and more still (for the heart will rest its hopes somewhere) upon some undefined, unscriptural views of God's mercy. Others, more enlightened, it is true, but still egregiously wrong, repose a general trust in the merits of Christ; forgetting that this trust is the personal specific act of a broken and contrite heart, which not only flees to that atoning sacrifice, but, despairing of all other help, eagerly embraces this. A heart right with Christ in this respect has gone through the process of awakening, of arousing fears, of conviction of utter helplessness, and then surrenders its whole case to Christ, trusting solely in the merit of his death, and the power of his intercession; looking through them alone, and looking now, for the mercy of God into eternal life. 2. *The heart is not right with Christ unless it loves him.* Considered abstractedly, all would pronounce it a thing monstrous, and almost a diabolical act, not to love the Saviour, and yet, sad as is this state of the heart, what can be more common? He stands before us arrayed in the perfection of virtue and holiness, and yet his character possesses no interest for us, as though it had no form or comeliness that men should desire Him as their example. He exhibits the tenderest benevolence, but what heart is moved by it, or shows forth its praise? Men are under an infinite obligation to Him, for He died to save them, but this excites no gratitude. He holds out to them the blessings purchased by His blood, and they spurn them for every trifle. What a state of the heart is this? You see that it is wrong, awfully wrong. Yes, and it never can be right till it loves Christ supremely. 3. *When the heart is right with Christ, there is an habitual confidence in His intercession.* That is what is called the life of faith, or living by faith, and it is by this that

the real is distinguished from the nominal believer. Faith is not one single act, but a constant reliance on the Saviour's mediation, as that which alone stands between the extreme of justice and ourselves, and by which we are looking for all good, for the supply of every want. Thus when the heart is right with Him it rests not in acknowledging His merit, but draws its virtue from heaven. It is not satisfied with acknowledging a fulness of spiritual blessings to be in Him, but derives them from Him through its specific and habitual exercises.

III. **If our hearts be right, they are right with the church of Christ.** 1. *When the heart is in a right state, the church is avowed.* There is the church and the world—the one is renounced, the other embraced. Baptism is not of itself a sufficient avowal. We shall unite ourselves to some portion of the visible church, and so place ourselves under its discipline. Where this is not the case the heart is not right. That which keeps us in the world is some bad principle which we will not renounce, some guilty shame which we will not cast off, some sinful association which we will not break, some evil practice which we will not amend. 2. *Its members are loved.* A new sentiment is now awakened, and cherished in obedience to the commandment of Scripture, "Love one another." And this is holy charity. There would be some peculiarities in the opinions and practices of Jehonadab; yet Jehu says to him, "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? If it be, give me thine hand." 3. *When our heart is right with the church, we feel we are identified with it.* We grieve at its failures. In its successes we rejoice. We say, with the psalmist, If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning." We pray for its prosperity, and say, "Peace be within thy walls." We are willing to labour in any part which the providence of God may assign to us, if we may but promote its interests.

IV. **If the heart be right, it will be right with itself.** There are strange oppositions and divisions in the heart, and this cannot be a right state of it. There is opposition between conviction and choice. Many know the good, who choose it not, who make no effort for its attainment. There is opposition between will and power. To will is indeed present with them, but how to perform they find not. There is the struggle between the flesh and the spirit; the counteraction of graces by opposite evils. There is the stunted growth. The seed is at least so far choked, that there is no fruit unto perfection. When it is thus with us, the heart is manifestly wrong. When it is right, it exerts an enlightened sway over the whole man. All its powers are in obedient order, all its graces fruitful and abundant. 1. *Perhaps our heart is wrong.* Let us be thankful that we perceive this; but be patient and persevering. Go to the very depths of its error and wrong. Heal not the wound slightly. The case may be hard; but it is not a hopeless one. 2. *Perhaps it is in part right.* For this be thankful; but rest not here. Many evils have already given way. I see you laden with the spoils of some conquered enemies, more are nearly overthrown. O pursue the fugitives; seek them in their caves, and dens, and hiding-places. Be determined on their final, their utter extirpation. 3. *Know and use the means by which this may be accomplished.* Exercise faith in the Saviour, live in habitual watchfulness and self-denial, "keeping the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." O lovely sight, not only to men and angels, but to God also, even a heart renewed, stamped with the Divine image, warmed with the Divine life, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. It is the temple of God, the glorious workmanship of Christ; and He shall exhibit it at the last day as the fruit of his passion, and the monuments of his all-subduing all-restoring grace. — *R. Watson.*

— **Jehonadab and Jehu: a symbol 1. Of war and peace. 2. Of the man**

of action and the man of contemplation. 3. Of zeal and prudence. 4. Of the union of various gifts and graces in the common service of God.

— Jehonadab is a type of faithful adherence to the faith and the customs of the fathers in the midst of an apostate, wavering people. Decided and firm faith, combined with a strict and earnest life, compels respect even from those who themselves follow another course. Where there is agreement in the highest and most important interests, there one may find a speedy and easy basis of intercourse, whatever may be the difference of rank or nationality. Jesus says to me and thee, what Jehu said to Jehonadab—If thine heart is right with mine, as mine with thine, then come to me upon my throne (Rev. iii. 21).—*Lange.*

Verse 16. Zeal for God. I. A laudable and desirable impulse. II. Should be used in exposing and punishing wrong, and in promoting that which is good. III. Should be under the control of a heart right with God.

— Why should Jehu so desire that his zeal should be noted and noticed? Hypocrisy is very ostentatious. Drones make more noise than bees, though they make neither honey nor wax. It is reported of John Fox that as he was going along London streets, a woman of his acquaintance met with him, and as they discoursed together she pulled out a Bible, telling him she was going to hear a sermon; whereupon he said to her, If you will be advised by me, go home again. But said she, when shall I then go? To whom he answered, When you tell nobody of it.—*Trapp.*

— Zeal for the Lord is a great and rare thing when it is pure. It forfeits its reward, however, when it aims to be seen. How many a one deceives himself with his zeal for the Lord and for His kingdom, when at the bottom he is zealous only for himself, for his own honour and fame, his own interest and advantage.—*Lange.*

— Some have thought that this was all pretended zeal and showy hyprocrisy, but in verse 30 the Lord commends Jehu for having done well, and declares that his bloody work was right in His eyes and according to the feelings of His own heart. In other things Jehu sinned, and it is not pretended that all his measures and motives in his work of doom had the approval of God; but in executing judgment on Ahab's house his zeal was praised, though it was not without a selfish ambition, and perhaps other elements of wickedness. But we need not call Jehu a heartless boaster and a murderous hypocrite. Shall he be blamed as murderous and cruel who obeys to the very letter Jehovah's positive command? If the fall of the tower in Siloam were really a Divine judgment on the eighteen hapless victims whom it ground to powder (Luke xiii. 4), need we charge the tower with blood-guiltiness and cruelty? Sometimes, indeed, God uses wicked hands to execute His counsels, and holds them guilty for their deeds (Acts ii. 23); but never does He blame a minister of vengeance for doing what His own word has positively commanded him to do. Let us beware how we curse and blame what God has not blamed. There are in our times too many shallow and unbiblical attempts to ignore the awful severities of Divine justice, as revealed in God's word.—*Whedon.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 18-28.

The Punishment of Idolatry.

Jehu's thirst for blood is not yet satiated. There remains one more power that menaces his peaceful and safe possession of the throne. The Baal-idolatry was so closely interwoven with the fortunes and prestige of the dynasty of Ahab, that Jehu must feel his crown insecure while that *cultus* was allowed to

predominate. He rapidly matures a scheme by which the priests and worshippers of Baal shall be utterly exterminated, and the very name of the great Phœnician deity degraded and made an abomination for ever. It was a horrible conception. But Jehu was in the temper of mind, in the fever-flush of slaughter, when such conceptions had nothing revolting in them. He had shed too much blood already to shrink for a moment from shedding more. He was the more confirmed in his resolution, as he had the countenance and co-operation of the God-fearing Jehonadab, who saw in this subtle plan the necessary and deserved punishment of idolatry.

I. That the punishment of idolatry is in harmony with Divine law. Judged in the light of Mosaic ethics, the destruction of idolaters was a righteous and laudable work. The law commanded that the devotees of idolatry should be punished with death (Deut. xiii. 1-15; xvii. 2-4; xviii. 20). There is nothing clearer in the history before us than this—that all the calamities that fell upon Ahab were in consequence of his idolatry. Two of the grandest prophets of Old Testament times were sent to instruct and warn him and his people. Their counsels and miracles were unheeded, and the chosen people of God were in danger of being irredeemably lost in idolatry, and His gracious purpose concerning the race of being frustrated or indefinitely postponed. As a just punishment for disobedience and rejection of Jehovah, and in the wider interests of the nation and of the world, the Baal-worship must be utterly destroyed. In this respect Jehu was the instrument of just and righteous vengeance.

II. That the punishment of idolatry may be accomplished by false and unjustifiable methods. Here we cannot but blame Jehu, and here the Old Testament morality rebukes him. He interposed the cunning and plotting of the military stategist into the carrying out of a righteous work. His Divine commission doubtless authorised him to cut off the worshippers of Baal, *but not by guile*. God praised his *zeal* in rooting out idolatry, but not his *subtlety*. His craft and guile on this occasion were in fearfulness equal to the duplicity and baseness which prepared the way for the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Truth never requires a lie. The end does *not* justify the means. It is unjustifiable to do a right thing in a wrong way. And yet what a large class of people there is in the world who do this! There is an evil that is damaging society; the more licence it has, the more it grows; it must be put down; let all possible force be put into operation to crush it; irrespective of the rights and feelings and opinions of others, root it out. It is the right thing to do; but in the majority of instances it is done in the wrong way. There's a friend yonder going wrong; he has no longer the humility and zeal and power he used to have; he must be remonstrated with. It is the right thing to do; but in nine cases out of ten it is done in the wrong way, and more harm is done than good. A rude, impulsive, unsympathetic spirit hurried Jehu into acts of unnecessary severity and cruelty while he was seeking to do what was right, and he has many imitators in that respect in modern times.

III. That the punishment of idolatry should nevertheless be thorough and final. "Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel" (verse 28). In slaying the priests and worshippers of Baal, the sword of Jehu completed the work which Elijah began at the brook Kishon (1 Kings xviii. 40). The deep corruption into which this idolatry had sunk the nation is evident in the fact that there was not one man with spirit and bravery enough to dispute the usurpation of Jehu, and in the cowardice and cruelty with which men of the highest rank assisted in the murder of the king's sons. It was time that a system that

could produce such utter moral degradation as this should be extinguished. Jehu was at home in such work; it was everyway congenial to his instincts. The images of Baal are shattered, the sacred citadel of Baal himself is invaded, his colossal figure is broken in pieces, the massive temple is pulled down in ruins, and the very site made a place of filth—a degradation which would cover the name of Baal with everlasting infamy and reproach. Such must be the fate of all that seeks to oppose and substitute itself for God. Every age of shams and unrealities has its Iconoclast who will shatter them in pieces. The world should be wiser and better as it reads the history and fate of all false systems.

LESSONS:—1. *Jehovah cannot tolerate a rival.* 2. *All idolatries must perish.* 3. *In the midst of the deepest degeneracy God is preparing the instrument of its punishment.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 18-28. Idolatry a national curse. I. Demoralizes the people. II. Is hateful to Jehovah. III. Not to be abolished by deceitful and unjust methods. IV. Witnesses in its destruction no greater enormities than it generates itself. V. Its complete uprooting essential to national growth and prosperity.

— In an objective light the slaying of the servants of Baal was quite in harmony with the law, and quite legitimate on theocratic grounds; but the subjective motive which, irrespective of the artifice, influenced Jehu was thoroughly selfish. As the priests and prophets of Baal in the land of Israel, with all their interests and their whole existence, were bound up with the dynasty of Ahab, they might be dangerous to Jehu, if he did not, from political considerations, earnestly promote their objects; whereas by their extermination he might hope to bring to his side the whole of the certainly very numerous party of the earlier legally constituted worship of Jehovah in Israel, and thereby give stability to his throne. But that Jehu used religion only as a means to an end is proved by the circumstance that he continued the worship of the calves.—*Keil.*

— A work which is in itself pure and holy loses its value when it is accomplished by falsehood and dissimulation. One cannot battle for the truth with the weapons of falsehood. What things one may do by outward acts, and yet be internally a hypocrite! Jehu dissimulated in order to circumvent the hypocrites and idolaters in himself. Jehu destroys the worship of false gods by the sword, and by external violence. He had full justification for this in the law, for under the old covenant idolatry was the worm at the root of the Israelitish nationality; it was high treason to the Israelitish state. Under the new covenant, it is not permitted to make use of fire and sword against heresy and superstition. No other weapon may here be used than that of the Spirit—*i.e.*, the word of God. Christianity is not bound to any people; as it was not brought into the world by violence, so it cannot be extended and nourished by the sword. Even now, every evil power has the right and the duty to proceed to extreme measures against a cultus like that of Baal, which is interwoven with licentiousness and abominations. —*Lange.*

Verses 18-21. What a dead paleness was there now in the faces of those few true-hearted Israelites that looked for a happy restoration of the religion of God! How could they choose but think—Alas! how are we fallen from our hopes! Is this the change we looked for? Was it only

ambition that hath set this edge upon the sword of Jehu? It was not the person of Ahab that we disliked, but the sins; if those must still succeed, what have we gained? Woe be to us, if only the author of our misery be changed, not the condition, not the cause of our misery. On the other side, what triumphs sounded everywhere of the joyful Baalites! What glorying of the truth of their profession, because of their success! What scorn of their dejected opposites! What promises to themselves of a perpetuity of Baalism! How did the dispersed priests of Baal now flock together, and applaud each other's happiness, and magnify the devotion of their new sovereign? Never had that idol so glorious a day as this, for the pomp of his service. Before, he was adored singly in corners; now solemn sacrifices shall be offered to him by all his clients, in the great temple of the mother city of Israel. I can commend the zeal of Jehu; I cannot commend the fraud of Jehu. We may come to our end even by crooked ways. He that bade him to smite for Him, did not bid him to lie for Him. Falsehood, though it be but tentative, is neither needful nor approved by the God of truth. If policy have allowed officious untruths, religion never.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 18, 19. **Duplicity.** 1. Should be beneath the dignity of a king. 2. Not allowable, even in the execution of a righteous punishment. 3. All the more detestable when under the mask of religious zeal.

Verse 19. That it was possible for a large number of persons to be imposed upon by this pretence, after what Jehu had done, painfully evinces the extent of religious corruption in Israel. Something may, however, be allowed for the still imperfect knowledge of the transactions at Jezreel. News travelled but slowly in those days; and the men who had come over with the king to Samaria—his personal followers and guards—had perhaps been instructed not yet to disclose the full particulars of the great tragedy at Jezreel.—*Kitto.*

Verses 20-22. **The popularity of religion no proof of its genuineness.** I. The court set the fashion in religion, and the people followed. II. Whatever pleases the outer senses—in ceremony or vestments—is sure to be popular. III. A national holiday soon gathers a crowd. IV. A crowd is little aware of the peril with which it is sometimes threatened.

Verse 23. **Sincerity in worship.** I. Should be encouraged by self-scrutiny. II. Essential to spiritual profit. III. Demanded by an all-seeing God.

Verse 25. How is the tune now changed! What shrieking was here! What outcries! What running from one sword to the edge of another! What scrambling up the walls and pillars! What climbing into the windows! What vain endeavours to escape that death which would not be shunned! Whether running, or kneeling, or prostrate, they must die. The first part of the sacrifice was Baal's, the latter is God's; the blood of beasts was offered in the one, of men in the other. The shedding of this was so much the more acceptable to God, by how much these men were more beasts than those they sacrificed. *Bp. Hall.*

Verses 26-28. **The glory of Baal** 1. Discovered to be empty and deceptive. 2. Powerless to resist the fury of righteous retribution. 3. Dragged down to the most loathsome degradation.

Verse 28. So ended this great revolution. The national worship of Baal was thus in the northern kingdom for ever suppressed. For a short time, through the very circumstances which had destroyed it in Samaria, it shot up afresh in Jerusalem. But in Israel the whole kingdom and

church returned to the condition in which it was before the accession of the house of Omri. The calf-worship of Jeroboam was once more revived, and in that imperfect form the true religion once more became established. — *Stanley.*

— If we attempt with all this light given to us by the text to estimate Jehu's personal feeling in regard to this revolution, we shall reach the following conclusion—Jehu was a military man to whom the crown presented itself as an object of earthly ambition worth some effort. Supposing him to have been by conviction an adherent of the religion of Jehovah, the call to him to put himself at the head of a reaction in favour of the Jehovah-religion, and the anointment to the royal office by a prophet of Jehovah, might move him to make the attempt. The adherence of the army determined him. When he had won his victory, he carried out faithfully the policy to which he was bound as leader of the Jehovah-party. He put an end to the worship of Baal. The crown, however, was his reward. It was a political reward, and he took political means to secure it. He slew all the possible pretenders to the crown from the house of Ahab, according to the oriental custom in such cases, as a means of securing himself on the throne. He stopped short with his religious reforms, and did not destroy the golden calves. He left them for the same political reasons for which Jeroboam erected them—that the northern kingdom might have its own religious centres outside of Jerusalem. He saw in the revolution principally a gratification of his own ambition. He was willing to be the instrument of the overthrow of a wicked dynasty and a corrupt religion, and he stopped just where his personal interests were in danger of being impaired. It is not strange that his contemporaries rejoiced so much at the rescue of their ancestral religion that they were indifferent to the excesses by which Jehu tried to establish his royal power, nor that later and calmer judges, on the contrary, raised his bloodshed into prominence in judging of his career.—*Editor of Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 29-36.

The Imperfections of a Great Reforming Work.

The fearless and energetic efforts of Jehu at the beginning of his reign, while they filled many with dismay, excited in others the highest hopes. There were the hidden ones, the secret worshippers of Jehovah, who mourned over the degeneracy of the ti es, and sighed and prayed for a brighter day to dawn. It seemed as if their prayers were heard, and they recognised in the man who had dealt such fierce and summary justice to the adherents of Baal, one who would again establish the worship of Jehovah, and thus save the nation from the whirlpool of ruin into which it was rapidly sinking. It was therefore a bitter disappointment to all lovers of the truth when Jehu stayed his reforming hand, and gave his public sanction to the calf-worship of Jeroboam, putting back the nation to where it was ninety years before. The paragraph suggests *the imperfections of a great reforming work.*

I. That reform is imperfect when it does not thoroughly root out the evil against which it is directed (verse 29). If the worship of the golden calves was not so gross as that of Baal, still it was idolatry, and as such should have been abolished. It was a standing insult to Jehovah, a violation of the Divine law, and a source of moral enfeeblement to the people, weighing upon them like chains of habit which are generally too small to be felt till they are too strong to be broken. It was an opportunity for Jehu to rid the nation once and

for ever of the terrible curse. The hand that struck down Baal could also crush the calves of Dan and Bethel It was here the reformer failed; his work was ineffectual because it lacked thoroughness. Half reforms are always unsatisfactory. An admitted evil can be cured only by complete eradication.

II. That reform is commendable as far as it goes (verse 30). 1. *It has the Divine approval.* "The Lord said unto Jehu, thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes." Every attempt at reformation is encouraged by the Divine favour. It is this that sustains the courage of the reformer in the midst of formidable difficulties. We may well hesitate to touch any work of reformation that has not the Divine sanction, and on which we cannot ask the Divine blessing. Jehu was an instrument of Divine vengeance on the house of Ahab, and was commended so far as he carried out his commission.

2. *It has the Divine reward.* "Thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." This was a favour not vouchsafed to any other king of Israel since the division of the kingdom. Lange supposes that the succession is limited to the fourth generation because Jehu still retained the calf worship; but we prefer the *prima facie* teaching of the text, which clearly indicates a promise of reward, rather than a threat of limitation. God will not be indebted to any man, nor shall those who do or suffer aught for Him complain of a hard bargain. The final reward of the Christian victor will be to share the throne and honours of his Lord (Rev. iii. 21).

III. That reform is imperfect when it is not personal and sincere (verse 31). "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart." It was not with him so much a question of religion as of politics. He was not anxious first to have his own heart right with God, and to render sincere obedience to His law, as he was to secure a firm footing as king, and to compel obedience to his authority. Jehu, as Kitto justly remarks, "was one of those decisive, terrible, ambitious yet prudent, calculating, passionless men whom God from time to time raises up to change the fate of empires, and to execute His judgments on the earth. He boasted of his zeal —Come and see my zeal for the Lord—but at the bottom, it was zeal for Jehu. His zeal was great so long as it led to acts which squared with his own interests, but it cooled marvellously when required to take a direction in his judgment less favourable to them." All true and permanent reformation begins with the individual. If the heart be renewed, the whole man is reformed: the heart right with God is the motive-force that effects all necessary outward reformation.

IV. That reform is imperfect when it is not national and general (verses 32, 33). Had the nation been wholly delivered from idolatry, neither Hazael nor any other enemy would have been permitted to invade the kingdom and harass the people. The national spirit was broken, its prestige dimmed, even the love of fatherland was not strong enough to bind all the people together to resist and repel invasion. In the latter part of Jehu's reign, Israel began to suffer those fearful punishments of invasion and conquest from the North and North East, which finally ended in the total captivity of the land. Jehu's name occurs on the Assyrian monuments among others who paid tribute to the king of Assyria, and Rawlinson inclines to the opinion that from this date both the Jewish and the Israelitish kings held their crowns as fiefs, dependent on the will of the Assyrian monarch, with whom it formally lay to confirm each new prince in his kingdom (chap. xiv. 5). Partial and incom-

plete reforms always leave elements of weakness and discord behind them. When a nation is united in acknowledging and serving God, it is invincible; it is respected and feared by its enemies.

V. That reform is imperfect when it is employed for selfish ends (verses 34-36). Jehu carried on the revolution, and wrought out reforms with an iron hand, to serve his own purposes—that he might reign securely and peacefully—might acquire fame and power—might establish his throne for years, and be able to leave his own son in unquestioned and undisturbed possession of the kingdom. He reigned longer than any of his predecessors, and his successors reigned seventy-six years. If his zeal and ambition were expended in founding a royal dynasty, he gained his end; but that was all he did gain. The nation was not permanently benefited, nor was it long arrested in its downfall. It destroys the dignity and efficacy of reform when it is carried on from selfish motives; and yet God can work out His just retribution upon evil-doers through the violence and selfishness of human passions.

LESSONS:—1. *It is a solemn responsibility to be a public reformer.* 2. *It is disappointing and disastrous when reform is not radical.* 3. *Every step of reform in the right direction is pleasing to God, and shall not go unrewarded.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 29-33. Jehu is a type of those who show great zeal in tearing down and destroying superstition and false worship, but do nothing to build up the faith, because they themselves have no living faith, and do not walk before God with all their hearts. Jehu did indeed destroy idolatry, but he did not touch the chief sin of Israel, because he considered it the chief support of his own authority. So many a one renounces gross, external sins, but will not think of denying himself, of sacrificing his own interests, and of turning his heart to the living God. He who remains standing half-way goes backward in spite of himself. Jehu would not desist from the sins of Jeroboam because he thought it would cost him his crown, but on that very account he lost one province after another.—*Lange.*

Verse 29. The exigencies of government. 1. Cannot ignore the influence of religion upon a people. 2. Will sanction an imperfect religion rather than lose power. 3. In danger of placing politics and dynastic interests above religious reformation.

Verse 30. Zachariah, of the fourth generation, was slain by Shallum, and thus was this word of the Lord fulfilled (compare chap. xv. 12); and thus, too, according to the prophecy of Hosea (i. 4), did the Lord "avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu." For when the minister of Divine judgment himself turned to idolatry, the very blood of his guilty victims might well call for vengeance on him for doing the same things for which he had executed the Divine judgment on them (Rom. ii. 1).—*Whedon.*

— The strict impartiality of Divine Justice. 1. Recognises and commends what is good in the worst characters. 2. Apportions to every action its exact measure of reward. 3. Does not interfere with the exercise of individual freedom.

— Jehu first receives praise for the work which he has done, and afterwards is denounced, in his posterity at least, for the same action (compare verse 30 and Hosea i. 4). The first of these two points throws much light upon the second. The defection of Jehu showed that he had other ends in view than the pleasing of God.

Personal ambition had been at the bottom of his heart, and he had destroyed that form of idolatry which was identified with the house of Ahab. But having achieved his end, he took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord. The vengeance which had fallen upon Ahab's house had been the righteous retribution upon Ahab's sins; but the executioner gloated over and rejoiced in his work. He had his reward in the establishment of his dynasty for four generations. What was righteous in his spirit—his steadiness of purpose and hatred of injustice—all this God blessed. But the brutal ferocity, the remorseless indifference to agony and bloodshed, these evil elements prevailed over the better, and when the fire against Baal had burnt itself out for want of fuel, nought was left but dull ashes. His zeal for righteousness did not turn inwards and burn up his own sins. When there was nothing left to destroy, his occupation was gone. The same thirst for blood which had marked him, passed down, a ghastly bequeathment, to his children, and brought the Divine curse upon them. —*The Bible Educator.*

Verse 31. The seductive power of unbelief. 1. Arrests and paralyzes the efforts of the most zealous reformers. 2. Creates indifference to the most sublime revelations of God's word. 3. Unfits the soul for the highest spiritual experiences. 4. Leads to the practice of the basest idolatry.

— It is an entire goodness that God cares for. Perhaps, such is the bounty of our God, a partial obedience may be rewarded with a temporal blessing, as Jehu's severity to Ahab shall carry the crown to his seed for four generations; but we can never have any comfortable assurance of an eternal retribution if our hearts and ways be not perfect with God. Woe be to us, O God, if we be not all thine! We cannot but everlastingly depart from Thee, if we depart not from every sin. Thou hast purged our hearts from the Baal of our gross idolatries. O clear us from the golden calves of our petty corruptions, also that Thou mayst take pleasure in our uprightness, and we may reap the sweet comforts of Thy glorious remuneration!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 32, 33. National apostacy from God. 1. Will be Divinely punished. 2. Leaves the nation a prey to violent enemies. 3. Brings national loss and degradation.

— The reign of Jehu closed in disaster. The Syrian invasion, from combating which he had hastened on becoming king, had been vigorously pushed forward by Hazael, and was now successful. The whole country east of Jordan, comprising half of the kingdom of Israel, was wrested away. And this had been done with the accompaniment of horrible cruelty on the part of Hazael (2 Kings viii. 12, 13). The reign of Jehu, therefore, was one of misery and calamity. He was the first Israelite king, too, who is recorded to have paid tribute to the king of Assyria. But one feature of his reign we must not forget. While he stands before us the one figure in the picture, red-handed and remorseless, we might, at first sight, take him as the embodiment of the whole monarchy and people. But he is not so. There was another emissary of God at work in the kingdom, though his name does not appear, his hand doubtless busy with healing and binding up the broken places. Elisha, the son of Shaphan, was he. Many years afterwards he lay dying, and Jehu's grandson came to bid him farewell. "My father," cried the king, "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof;" that is, the defence and protection of the kingdom art thou, and thou art passing away. Joash was hereby confessing the truth that deeds of violence and oppression like Jehu's have no power, and leave no advantage, but the Lord's delight is in them that fear Him and put their trust in His mercy.—*The Bible Educator.*

— The character of Jehu is not difficult to understand, if we take it as a whole, and consider the general im-

pression left us by the Biblical account. He is exactly one of those men whom we are compelled to recognize, not for what is good or great in themselves, but as instruments for destroying evil and preparing the way for good; such as Augustus Cæsar at Rome, Sultan Mahmond II. in Turkey, or one closer at hand in the revolutions of our own time and neighbourhood. A destiny, long kept in view by himself or others—inscrutable secresy and reserve in carrying out his plans—a union of cold, remorseless tenacity, with occasional bursts of furious, wayward, almost fanatical zeal; this is Jehu, as he is set before us in the historical narrative, the worst type of a son of Jacob, the "supplanter," as he is called, without the noble and princely qualities of Israel—the most unlovely and the most coldly commended of all the heroes of his country. It is a striking instance of the gradually increasing light, even in the Jewish dispensation, that in the wider and more evangelical revelations of the later prophets the commendation on Jehu's acts is repealed. It is declared through the voice of Hosea, that for the blood even of Jezebel and Ahaziah an account must be rendered; "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu" (Hosea i. 4). Their blood, like the blood which has been shed again and again in the convulsions of nations and churches, was a righteous retribution, is at last exacted by the just judgment which punishes the wrong-doer, not only of one party in the church or state, but of both. And the accursed spot of the ancient dynasty, the very title and site of Jezreel, seemed to draw down upon itself a kind of Divine compassion. The innocent child of the prophet was to bear the name of Jezreel, and "the vow" of Jehu's house "was to be broken. . . . in the great "day of Jezreel" (Hosea i. 4, 5, 11). It is the same touching thought of life growing out of death which has so often forced itself on those who have seen the rich harvest springing up out of a battlefield, that out of that time and place of humiliation the name is to go back to its original signification as derived from the beauty and fertility of the rich plain, and to become a pledge of the revived beauty and richness of Israel. "I will hear and answer the heavens, and they will hear and answer the earth, and the earth shall hear and answer, and the wine and the oil of that fruitful plain, and they shall hear and answer Jezreel (that is, the seed of God), and I will sow her unto me in the earth." And from this time the image seems to have been continued as a prophetical expression for sowing the blessings of God, and the people of Israel, as it were broadcast, as though the whole of Palestine and the world were to become, in a spiritual sense, one rich plain of Jezreel.—*Stanley*.

CHAPTER XI.

THE USURPATION OF ATHALIAH IN JUDAH.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Athaliah destroyed all the seed royal—She herself usurped the throne; and, to ensure her hold, slew all rival claimants. Jehu had already destroyed "forty-two" brethren or relations of Ahaziah (x. 13). Verse 2. Jehosheba, &c.—Her father was king Jehoram, but her mother was not the queen Athaliah; she and her sister Ahaziah were daughters by another wife of Jehoram. Took Joash and hid him in the bedchamber—*i. e.*, not the sleeping apartment, but the storeroom in which bedding was kept, for so חֲדַר הַמִּטּוֹת means. No one would be supposed to occupy that storeroom. Verse 3.

Hid in the house of the Lord—After a temporary hiding in the storeroom, he was removed into one of the temple chambers, and thus placed in greatest security under Jehoiada, the high

priest's care. Verse 4. And the seventh year Jehoiada sent, &c.—There are numerous points of difference between this account and its parallel in the Chronicles; but probably both accounts are summarised records of a longer original account. Their divergences are not disagreements. Verse 5. The watch of the king's house—This בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ must be, not the royal palace, but part of the temple buildings occupied by Joash, the young king. Verse 12. Gave him the testimony—Presented to him the הָעֵדוּת, book of the law, as the rule of his personal conduct and royal government, for "The Testimony" (Exod xxv. 21; xvi. 34) was the law for rulers as well as for those ruled (Deut. xvii. 18, *sq.*). Verse 14. Athaliah cried, Treason! Treason!—Josephus supplies the record that she went from her own palace attended by her troops (*μετὰ τῆς ἰδίας στρατιᾶς*), but that these troops were prevented going with her into the temple. Verse 16. And they laid hands on her—Though the *Sept.*, *Vulg.*, *Luther*, and others take the words as the *A. V.* gives them; yet the *Chald.*, *Syr.*, *Kimchi*, *Maurer*, and others render יָשִׂימוּ לָהּ יָדַיִם. They made for her two sides—*i. e.*, they opened in ranks on both sides for her to pass through. Verse 20. And all the people rejoiced—Because, with Athaliah's death, the accursed house of Ahab ceased, and in Jehoash's person the royal house of David was again established on the throne of Judah.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-8.

The Desperation of Revenge.

I. Is mingled with an ungovernable ambition.—As soon as Athaliah heard of the death of her son Ahaziah, and of the sanguinary policy pursued by Jehu, she determined to be revenged, and she set about the work with all the ferocity and unrelenting hardihood that characterised her mother Jezebel. Her imperious Zidonian nature and love of power were gratified, as well as her thirst for revenge. Through the path of vengeance she saw her way to a throne. A savage nature is always a suspicious one, and Athaliah saw that to make her power secure, her work of revenge must be thorough and complete. Revenge is a mean, paltry feeling, and cannot be cherished long, except in connection with selfish and ambitious schemes.

II. Hesitates not to adopt the cruellest measures to attain its object.—"She arose and destroyed all the seed-royal (verse 1). This insatiable ogress, this she-vampire, was so utterly insensible to all natural affection, or had become so consummate a mistress in the art of dissembling and stifling emotion, that, without a tear or a sob, she massacred her own grandchildren. She revelled in bloodshed, and rejoiced to "wade through slaughter to a throne." It was an evidence of her great capabilities and domineering influence, or of the utter moral degeneracy of Judah, that she, a foreigner and an idolater, should be allowed to reach supreme authority, and by such unnaturally cruel methods. Ambition, rendered desperate by revenge, is reckless as to the means used to achieve its purpose.

III. Is unconsciously frustrated when its plans seem most completely carried out (verse 2). Joash, the infant son of Ahaziah, was snatched from the general massacre, and hid in a room used for stowing away beds. Little did Athaliah dream that that helpless infant was to be the instrument of her fall. Revenge is ever a mistaken policy. The ancient poet tells us that Nemesis was transformed by Jupiter into a goose, to point out the folly of revenge. "Suppose a mad dog bites me," argues Feltham in his Resolves, "shall I be mad, and bite that dog again? If I kill him, it is not so much to help myself, as to keep others from harm. My interest is to seek a present remedy, while, pursuing the cur, I may at once both lose my wit and my cure.

If a wasp sting me, I pursue not the winged insect through the air, but straight apply to draw the venom forth." The right of vengeance belongs to God alone. To take the matter into our own hands we usurp His authority and insult His righteous Majesty. In seeking to rectify a wrong, we inflict a greater, and bring ruin and confusion upon ourselves. "While we throw a petty vengeance on the head of our offending brother, we boldly pull the Almighty's on our own."

IV. Cannot give permanency to its triumphs. "He was hid six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land" (verse 3). Only six years, and then—the swift-footed Nemesis—"the bitterest of the immortals"—overtook the imperial murderess. Six years of tyrannising power, of regal display, of cringing adulation on the part of her professed supporters, and then—a sudden and ignominious downfall. Six years of patient waiting, of vigilant watching, of careful preparation on the part of those who had to redress the wrong, and then—the blow fell with crushing and decisive effect. Was it worth while to commit such horrible crimes for such brief, illusive, and equivocal results? It does not pay to sin. The triumph snatched by the red hand of crime withered in the grasp. The sceptre is transformed into an avenging sword, the crown into a wreath of torture, and the throne into a tomb.

LESSONS:—1. *An ambitious spirit has great temptations to do wrong.* 2. *Revenge is blind to the consequences of its acts.* 3. *It is God-like to forgive rather than retaliate, to suffer wrong than resent it.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-3. Queen Athaliah. 1. *Her wicked plans.* Idolatrous and fond of power, like her mother Jezebel, she takesthe royal authority into her own hands, in self-will and contrary to right, and murders all the male seed, in order to put an end for ever to the house of David. We see here whither ambition and love of rule may lead men. 2. *The frustration of her plans.* No one can tread down him whom God sustains. Thus, Pharaoh would have been glad to destroy Israel; Saul would have slain David; Herod the child Jesus. They could not accomplish it. They only injured themselves and perished, as Athaliah did.—*Wurt. Summ.*

— We have reached the eve of a great revolution and counter revolution, which alone of all the events in the history of the kingdom of Judah possesses the dramatic interest belonging to so many other parts of the sacred story, and which is told with a vividness of detail, implying its lasting significance, and contrasting remarkably with the scanty outlines of the earlier reigns. The friendly policy of the two royal houses had culminated in the marriage of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, with Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. In her, the fierce determined energy which ran through the Phœnician princes and princesses of that generation—Jezebel, Dido, Pygmalion—was fully developed. Already in her husband's reign the worship of Baal was restored; and when the tidings reached Jerusalem of the overthrow of her father's house, of the dreadful end of her mother, and of the fall of her ancestral religion in Samaria, instead of daunting her resolute spirit, it moved her to a still grander effort. It was a critical moment for the house of David. Once from a struggle within the royal household itself, a second time from an invasion of Arabs, a third time from the revolution in the massacres of Jehu's accession, the dynasty had been thinned and thinned till all the outlying branches of those vast polygamous households had been reduced to the

single family of Ahaziah. Ahaziah himself had perished with his uncle on the plain of Esdraelon, and now, when Athaliah saw that Ahaziah was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal. The whole race of David seemed to be swept away. In the general massacre of the princes one boy, still a babe in arms, had been rescued by Jehosheba. He was known as "the king's son." The light of David was burnt down to its socket, but there it still flickered. The stem of Jesse was cut down to the very roots; one tender shoot was all that remained On him rested the whole hope of carrying on the lineage of David.—*Stanley.*

Verse 1. When the corpse of her son was brought to Jerusalem—when she heard how horribly her mother and how treacherously her brother had been slain—that her son's kindred had been cut off at the pit of the shearing house, and that the worshippers of Baal had been immolated in Samaria—Athaliah caught the strong contagion of blood-thirstiness from the report of these doings. She saw herself a stranger in a strange land, an alien by birth and by religion, without common sympathies between herself and the people among whom she occupied so high a place, and without support from the remaining members of the family to which she had become allied. All the strong ones were gone. What hindered that she should herself seize the dropped reigns of government, and guide the fierce steeds of ruin which threatened to whirl her to destruction? What had she to expect from the spirit which had gone abroad, and from the ulterior designs of Jehu, unless she entered upon a bold course of reaction which might insure both her safety and her greatness! There have been those who deemed themselves compelled to leap into a throne to save themselves from utter ruin: and we would fain believe this was the case with Athaliah.—*Kitto.*

— Such another imperious woman was Semiramis, Queen of Assyria; Irene, empress of Constantinople and mother of Constantinus Copronymus, whose eyes she put out to make him incapable of the empire, that she might reign alone (*vide* "Gibbon's Roman Empire," ch. xlvii.); and Brumchildis, queen of France, who is said to have been the death of ten princes of the blood, and was herself afterwards put to a cruel death. But the likest in cruelty to Athaliah was Laodice, the wife of Ariarathes, king of Cappadocia, who, her husband being dead, seized upon the government, raged cruelly against both nobility and commons, whom she caused to be murdered; poisoned six of her own sons that she might keep the kingdom more securely; only one little one escaped her fury, whom the people at last advanced to the crown, and slew her.—*Trapp.*

— Jehoshaphat's marriage of his son with a daughter of the house of Ahab, although he brought it about in a good intention, produced the result that Athaliah ruled over Judah, and brought the dynasty of David to the brink of ruin. So many a quiet, humble, God-fearing family has been brought into calamities, affecting both body and soul, by a thoughtless marriage. The hope that those who are brought up by godless parents will themselves reform and turn to the fear of God has very slight foundation.—*Lange.*

Verses 2, 3. Stolen from death. Grandmothers are more lenient with their children's children than they were with their own. At forty years of age, if discipline be necessary, chastisement is used; but at seventy, the grandmother, looking upon the misbehaviour of the grandchild, is apologetic, and disposed to substitute confectionary for whip. There is nothing more beautiful than this mellowing of old age toward childhood. But here, we have a contrast. It is old Athaliah, the queenly murderess. She ought to have been honourable. Her father was a king; her husband was a king; her son was

a king. And yet we find her plotting for the extermination of the entire royal family, including her own grandchildren. But while the ivory floors of the palace run with carnage, and the whole land is under the shadow of a great horror, a fleet-footed woman, a clergyman's wife, Jehosheba by name, stealthily approaches the imperial nursery, seizes upon the grandchild that had somehow as yet escaped massacre, wraps it up tenderly but in haste, flies down the palace stairs, her heart in her throat lest she be discovered in this Christian abduction. With this youthful prize she presses into the room of the ancient temple, the church of olden time, unwraps the young king, and puts him down, sound asleep as he is, and unconscious of the peril that has been threatened; and there for six years he is secreted in that church apartment. Meanwhile old Athaliah smacks her lips with satisfaction, and thinks that all the royal family are dead.

I. The first thought is *that the extermination of righteousness in an impossibility.* When a woman is good, she is apt to be very good; and when she is bad, she is apt to be very bad, and this Athaliah was one of the latter sort. She would exterminate the last scion of the house of David, through whom Jesus was to come. She folds her hands, and says: The work is done—is completely done. Is it? In the swaddling-clothes of that church apartment are wrapped the cause of God and the cause of good government. That is the scion of the house of David; it is Joash, the religious reformer; it is Joash, the friend of God; it is Joash, the demolisher of Baalitish idolatry. Rock him tenderly; nurse him gently. Athaliah, you may kill all the other children, but you cannot kill him. Eternal defences are thrown all around him, and this clergyman's wife, Jehosheba, will snatch him up, will hide him for six years, and at the end of that time he will come forth for your dethronement and obliteration. Just as poor a botch does the world always make of extinguishing righteousness. Just at the time when they thought they had slain all the royal family of Jesus, some Joash would spring up and take the throne of power. Infidelity says: "I'll just exterminate the Bible," and the Scriptures were thrown into the street for the mob to trample on, and they were piled up in the public squares and set on fire, and mountains of indignant contempt were hurled on them, and learned universities decreed the Bible out of existence. If there should come a time of persecution in which all the known Bibles of the earth should be destroyed—all these lamps of life that blaze in our pulpits and in our families extinguished—in the very day that infidelity and sin should be holding jubilee over the universal extinction, there shall be a secreted copy of the Bible; and this Joash of eternal literature would come out and come up and take the throne, and the Athaliah of infidelity and persecution would fly out of the back door of the palace, and drop her miserable carcase under the hoofs of the horses of the king's stables. You cannot exterminate Christianity. You cannot kill Joash.

II. The second thought is: *That there are opportunities in which we may save royal life.* You know that profane history is replete with stories of strangled monarchs and of young princes who have been put out of the way. Here is the story of a young king saved. Jehosheba, you hold in your arms the cause of God and good government. Fail, and he is slain; succeed, and you turn the tide of the world's history in the right direction. It seems as if between that young king and his assassins there is nothing but the frail arm of a woman. But why should we spend our time in praising this bravery of expedition, when God asks the same thing of you and me? All around us are the imperilled children of a great king. They are born of Almighty parentage, and will come to a throne or a crown

if permitted. But sin, the old Athaliah, goes forth to the massacre. There are sleeping in your cradles by night, there are playing in your nurseries by day, imperial souls waiting for dominion, and whichever side the cradle they get out will decide the destiny of empires. For each one of those children sin and holiness contend—Athaliah on the one side, Jehosheba on the other. Jehosheba knew right well that unless that day the young king was rescued, he would never be rescued at all. The reason we don't reclaim all our children from worldliness is because we begin too late. Parents wait until their children lie before they teach them the value of truth. They wait until their children swear before they teach them the importance of righteous conversation. They wait until their children are all wrapped up in this world before they tell them of a better world. May God arm us all for this work of snatching royal souls from death to coronation. Can you imagine any sublimer work than this soul saving?

III. The third thought is: *That the church of God is a good hiding place.* Would God that we were all as wise as Jehosheba, and knew that the church of God is the best hiding-place. Perhaps our parents took us there in early days; they snatched us away from the world and hid us behind the baptismal font, and amid the bibles and the psalm books. Oh, glorious enclosure! How few of us appreciate the fact that the church of God is a hiding-place! There are many people who put the church at so low a mark that they begrudge it everything, even the few dollars they give towards it. They make no sacrifice. If your children are to come up to lives of virtue and happiness, they will come up under the shadow of the church. If the church does not get them, the world will. Ah! when you pass away—and it will not be long before you do—it will be a satisfaction to see your children in Christian society. You want to have them sitting at the holy sacraments. You want them mingling in Christian associations. You would like to have them die in the sacred precincts! Oh! church of God, gate of heaven, let me go through it! All other institutions are going to fail. Jay Cooke's banking institution went down, Duncan, Sherman, and Co. went down, and all earthly institutions will perish; but the church of God, its foundation is the "Rock of Ages," its charter is for everlasting years, its keys are held by the universal proprietor, its dividend is heaven, its president is God. God grant that all this audience, the youngest, the eldest, the worst, the best, may find their safe and glorious hiding-place. where Joash found it, in the temple.—(*Talmage in C. W. P.*)

— O God! how worthy of wonder are thy just and merciful dispensations, in that thou sufferest the seed of good Jehoshaphat to be destroyed by her hand in whose affinity he offended, and yet savest one branch of this stock of Jehoshaphat for the sake of so faithful a progenitor!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 2. The great agents of the world's reformation. 1. Are prepared in secret. 2. May depend upon a single life. 3. Cannot be destroyed by the hatred and cruelty of the wicked. 4. Will inevitably come to the front

— The perils of a good movement. 1. May appear to be extinct when its reviving force is but in hiding. 2. Its hopes may be suspended on a frail infant life. 3. I. is opposed with unrelenting cruelty. 4. It is unexpectedly befriended in its greatest extremity.

— We have an instance in Jehosheba how, even in the midst of godlessness in a family, any one who will, can make an exception. Jehosheba stole him. That was not stealing the child, but saving him. What can a woman do better and nobler than to save an infant from danger of soul and body, and take him under

her protection for the sake of God and his promises?—*Lange.*

Verse 3. As mother of the king she had great power, high influence, and many dependants, which rendered her, in default of a king and of a capable heir to the throne, the most powerful person in the land. She was thus enabled to accomplish all her objects; and Judah beheld the strange sight of a woman, and that woman a foreigner, seated upon the throne of David. Under such auspices, idolatry became rampant in Judah. It would seem that nothing had been gained by the expression of idolatry in Israel; the same thing existed still, the place only having been changed, just as the piece of wood which disappears for a moment under the water comes up again a little way off. No doubt, the cause of the Baal-worship was strengthened by large accessions of fugitives who stole away from Israel. —*Kitto.*

— When the godless appear to have succeeded in the attainment of their objects, and believe that they have conquered, the very moment of their victory is the unperceived commencement of their ruin. The cross of Christ was the victory of His enemies, but this very victory was what brought about their total defeat.—*Krummacher.*

— Mischief sometimes fails of those appointments wherein it thinks to have made the surest work. God laughs in Heaven at the plots of tyrants, and befools them in their deepest projects. He had said to David—"Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy seat." In vain shall earth and hell conspire to frustrate it. —*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 4-16.

The Restoration of Regal and National Rights.

The coronation of the youthful Joash was not a revolutionary act, but the just and legal restoration of a right that had been cruelly wrested from him. Athaliah was the revolutionary, and the wrong her usurpation had inflicted sank deep into the national conscience. The usurper was hated while she was feared, and the ease with which her overthrow was accomplished showed the slight hold she had on the popular affection. There was none who had the courage or the disposition to defend her. From this paragraph we learn *That the restoration of regal and national rights—*

I. Is often the work of one capable and resolute mind. Jehoiada, the high priest, was in every way a remarkable man for his time. He was evidently not influenced by selfish and ambitious motives, or he might have aimed to raise his own wife Jehosheba to the throne, who, as the sister of Ahaziah, had certainly a better and stronger claim than Athaliah. But as the servant of Jehovah, he was more concerned to carry out the Divine purpose; and he was no doubt strengthened in his resolve by the counsels and exhortations of the prophets of the time. He showed great shrewdness and capacity in the way in which he managed every detail in the restoration of the line of David to the throne of Judah. 1. *He knew the right time to act.* "The seventh year" (verse 4). He had narrowly watched the course of events, he carefully estimated the influence of Athaliah and the true feeling of the nation, and had sufficient reasons why he should not act *before* or *after* the period he fixed upon. It may seem to us that, as the king was but a child, a few years either way could make but little difference. But Jehoiada was a man "who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. xii. 32). In all great national movements much wisdom

and insight are needed in order not unduly to precipitate or delay the right moment to act. Many a great battle has been lost by not knowing when to attack, or when to wait. 2. *He wins over the leading representatives of the nation* (verse 4). He consults all classes—civil, military, and ecclesiastical—and when the day of trial comes, he is surrounded and sustained by an enthusiastic and united people. He succeeded in convincing the national conscience of the existence of a great wrong, and the people rallied round him to seek its redress. 'Men's hearts," says Carlyle, "ought not be set against one another, but set *with* one another, and all against the evil thing only." 3. *He makes elaborate provision against possible defeat* (verses 5-11). He took advantage of a public and solemn festival, when a great number might assemble in the neighbourhood of the temple without suspicion; he secured two relays of Levites within the temple; he transformed the priests into soldiers, and furnished them with weapons that David had deposited in the temple years before, little dreaming that they would be used to defend his throne under such circumstances; and he surrounded the boy-king with a strong bodyguard.

"When any great designs thou dost intend,
Think on the means, the manner, and the end."

The prudence and foresight of Jehoiada not only indicated his ability, but ensured success. A great man cannot be more nobly employed than when he is planning the best means to promote the prosperity and elevation of his own country.

II. Is accomplished with becoming ceremonies, and attended with demonstrations of public joy (verse 12). 1. *There was the coronation.* "He put the crown upon him." The kings of Judah generally succeeded each other with little, if any ceremony, the solemn inauguration of the founder of the dynasty being usually considered sufficient for his descendants. The only kings whose accession was attended with ceremonial observances were Saul, the first king; David, the first of his line; Solomon, who had an elder brother aspiring to the crown; and now Joash, in whose person the broken line was restored. By this it is seen that the coronation was rather an exceptional than a customary ceromony, resorted to only when peculiar circumstances seemed to require the solemn public recognition which it involved (*Kitto*). 2. *There was the solemn anointing.* "They made him king and anointed him." There is nothing in the law respecting the anointing of kings. It speaks only of high priests; but as Samuel anointed the two first kings, and as it was an ancient custom to anoint them, this came to be regarded as an essential part of the ceremony. The king was anointed in the form of a diadem encircling his head, to show that he was the head of the people; but the high priest was anointed in the form of a cross, one line drawn in the oil running down his forehead, crossed by another line drawn between his eyebrows. 3. *There was the recognition of the Divine law.* "And gave him the testimony." The book of the law was put into the royal hands, and while he held it, he entered into a covenant with God to observe and keep His commandments as set forth therein. The king does more honour to himself than to the Word of God when he openly accepts that Word as the guide and directory of his regal career. 4. *There was the public rejoicing.* "And they clapped their hands and said, God save the King." The feeling of the people, so long suppressed, breaks out in joyous acclamation.

"One hour of joy dispels the cares
And sufferings of a thousand years."

Little joys, says Richter, refresh us constantly like housebread, and never bring disgust: joys are our wings, and sorrows are our spurs. Well might

the people be glad—they saw in the restoration of their king the restoration of the national rights of which they had been wickedly defrauded.

III Is made the more secure by the ignominious overthrow of the usurper (verses 13-16). The noise of the people reached the ears of Athaliah in her palace. What did it all mean? Had she a presentiment that it boded no good to her and her rule? Prompted by the undaunted spirit that animated her mother Jezebel to the last, she determined to ascertain for herself the cause of the tumult. Unguarded and alone she entered the temple, and the scene that met her gaze revealed the true state of affairs. She must have felt her fate was sealed. Her wild shrieks were unheeded: no one lifted a finger in her defence. She was seized, hurried beyond the precincts of the temple, which was not to be desecrated with her blood, and was instantly slain. Her overthrow was complete; and the throne of Joash was firmly established.

> "Though usurpers sway the rule awhile,
> Yet heaven is just, and time suppresseth wrongs."—*Shakespeare.*

LESSONS:—1. *No government is strong that is not based on the affections of the people.* 2. *Time and the providence of God are always on the side of right.* 3. *The purpose of God, though hidden and apparently defeated for a time, will inevitably come to the front.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 4-12. **Joash's elevation to the throne.** I. *How it was determined upon and prepared.* Jehoiada took the initiative, for it was his right and duty. It was no rebellion and conspiracy against a just authority, but a fact by itself. Rebels violate law and right in order that they may rule: Jehoiada restored law and right, and did not wish to rule; he remained what he was. He conducted himself with courage, but also with wisdom and prudence.

II. *How it was carried out and accomplished.* With the participation and approval of the different classes of the entire people, without conspiracy, bloodshed, or violence; in the house of God whose servant the king was; the crown and the law were given into his hands; he was anointed—significant symbols of his calling as king of the people of God.

Verse 4. **Jehoiada a faithful priest.** It is not hard to proclaim the word of God when the mighty and great of this world hold to it; but the faithfulness which is needed in the stewards of God's mysteries is that which will not be stayed or impaired when the great of this world despise and persecute the word, which will sail against the wind of courtly or popular favour, and will persevere in patience. The servants of the Church in the New Testament have not the same calling as the high priests in the Old, so that they have not to meddle with worldly affairs. Where spiritual and worldly authority go hand in hand, where both unite for the sake of God and for His cause, there the Lord gives blessing and prosperity.—*Lange.*

Verse 10. **New uses for old trophies.** After Solomon had built the temple, the trophies of David's victories were hung up there. So they adorned the walls. So they illustrated the valour of noble sires. So they served to kindle emulation in the breasts of true-hearted sons. Thus it was while generations sprung up and passed away; till at length other days dawned, darker scenes transpired, and sadder things filled up the chronicles of the nation. I. *It is well for us to hang all our trophies in the house of the Lord.* We, too, are warriors. Every

genuine Christian has to fight. Sometimes we have victories, a presage of that final victory we shall enjoy with our Great Captain for ever. We have been defeated when we have gone in our own strength; but when we have been victorious it has always been because the strength of the Lord was put forth for our deliverance. Hang up the shield, hang up the spear, let Jehovah's name be exalted. Bring forth the forgotten memorials of loving-kindness, expose them to public view, put them before your mind's eye, gratefully remember them, lovingly praise Him and magnify His name. If we have any victories, let all the trophies be dedicated to the Lord. II. *These trophies may come in useful at such times as we cannot foresee, and under such circumstances as we wot not of.* When in after years David hung up the swords and shields which he had taken from Philistine heroes, he did not surmise that one of his descendants, of the seed royal, would find the need to employ his own, his grandsire's, or further back from himself—his forefather's trophies—in order to establish himself on the throne. In all the battles we fight, the trophies we win should be stored, for they may come in for future use. There is no experience of a Christian that will not have some ultimate service to render him. You know not what may be the history of your life, it is unfinished yet; if you did know, you would see that in this present trial there is a preparation for some future emergency, which will enable you to come out of it in triumph. The shields and spears of David are hung up for future action. III. *Ancient weapons are good for present use.* Turn to the seventy-seventh Psalm, and you have a battle there. By looking through this psalm you will see David's shields and spears, and will soon learn how to screen yourself with the one, and how to do exploits with the other. The first weapon he drew out of the scabbard was the weapon of all prayer —another, that of remembering God —another, the teaching of tradition (he "considered the days of old")—another, his own experience—another an appeal to God's mercy (Ps. li.). But the great master weapon was the blood—"Purge me with hyssop," &c. Let sins come on, and let them be more than the hairs of my head, loftier than mountains, and deeper than the unfathomed ocean; let them come on. God's flaming wrath behind them, hell itself coming to devour me; yet if I can but take the cross and hold it up before me, if I can plead the precious blood, I shall be safe, and prove a conqueror. See that in all your fights you use the old, old weapons of David himself—his shields and spears—by these same weapons shall you also win the day. IV. *Did not David herein prefigure Him that was to come—David' Son and David's Lord?* Jesus Christ our King, has hung up many shields and spears in the house of the Lord. Sin—Christ has borne it in himself, endured its penalty, and overcome it; he has hung up the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, as a trophy in the house of the Lord. Satan, our great foe—He met him foot to foot in the wilderness, and discomfited him—met him in the garden —overcame him on the cross. Now hell, too, is vanquished—Christ is Lord. Death, too, the last enemy—Christ hath taken spoils from him. And the enmity of the human heart. How many of these enmities has Christ hung up in the hall, for he has conquered that enmity, and made the hater into a lover. There are some great sinners at this day who are wonderful tokens of the power of His love. What will heaven be when all of us shall be trophies of His power to save!—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

Verse 11. The true safe-guard of a king. 1. Not the weapons of the military. 2. But the legality and righteousness of his claims. 3. The respect and affection of his people. 4. The overshadowing presence and blessing of Jehovah.

Verse 12. How a bright morning

became a dark night—a lesson for the young. The priest Jehoiada was a very wise man, and the young king had sense enough to be led by him; with his death began sins and misfortunes which ended the life and the glory of king Joash. LEARN:—1. *That a good start is not everything.* It does not follow, because as boys and girls you live in a comfortable home and have all you want, that it will be always so. Joash was a king, and of course had many delightful things even when a child; but he came to know the want of them before his death. There is a wretched tramp on the roads to-day, who will sleep in the casual ward of some workhouse, who has had a better education than the master of the place. There are lads in the forecastle of merchant ships whose real names are not those entered on the ship's books, but who might have been graduates at Oxford if they had chosen to do well. Have a care, boys and girls, lest the comforts you now have be exchanged for self-made misery, and the good start only land you in darker depths than you would otherwise have known. LEARN:—2. *That crowns do not make kings.* The boy never was the ruler of the country. His uncle was master. Solomon says something about a jewel in a swine's snout; that seems a strange place to put a jewel, but you might as well look for it there as expect a coarse nature to become gentle because it is wearing a fine coat. Perhaps you have yet to learn that power means much more than strength. Joash was crowned; but when the old man died his real self came to the front. He chose foolish companions, turned aside to sin, caused the son of his benefactor to be murdered (2 Chron. xxiv. 21), and finished his poor vain life in shame, and was buried away from his kingly ancestors, while the priest was laid among those who ruled the land (*ib.*, verses 16 and 25). It will pay us to think, when we are tempted to do wrong—How will this appear when I am dead? What will people say as they carry me to my grave? Have you some gift which, like that crown on Joash's head, lifts you up above your companions? Be it money, strength, beauty, or learning, it will only make you kingly and keep you crowned, as you use it in the service of God, and in unselfish efforts to make others good and happy.—*T. Champness.*

— The oil wherewith he was anointed signified his designation to that high service and those endowments from heaven that might enable him to so great a function. The crown wherewith he was adorned signified that glory and majesty which should both encourage and attend his princely cares. The book of the testimony signified the divine rules and directions whereto he must frame his heart and actions in the wielding of that crown. These three—the oil, the crown, the testimony—that is, inward powers, outward magnificence, true piety and justice—make up a perfect prince. None of these may be wanting. If there be not a due calling of God, and abilities meet for that greatness, the oil faileth: if there be not a majestic grace and royalty that may command reverence, the crown is missing: if there be not a careful respect to the law of God as the absolute guide of all counsels and determinations, the testimony is neglected: all of them concurring make both king and people happy.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 13-16. Athaliah's fall. I. *Her last appearance.* She comes boldly and impudently into the midst of the people, blinded to their disposition towards her. Insolently relying on her imagined majesty, she commands resistance to the movement which is in progress—a faithful type of many tyrants. Pride goes before a fall. II. *Her terrible end.* Abandoned, despised, and hated by all the people, who rejoice over her fall, she goes to meet her doom, and receives the fate which her deeds deserve. She is punished by that

by which she has sinned. Sedition! treason! is the cry of Joram, Jezebel, and Athaliah, and of all those who are themselves most to blame for it (Acts xviv. 5).—*Lange.*

Verse 14. O Athaliah! to whom dost thou complain? They are thy just executioners wherewith thou art encompassed. If it be treason to set up the true heir of Ahaziah, thou appealest to thy traitors—the treason was thine; theirs is justice. The time is now come of thy reckonings for all the royal blood of Judah which thy ambition shed. Wonder rather at the patience of this long forbearance than the rigour of this execution.

Verse 16. How like is Athaliah to her mother Jezebel! as in conditions and carriage, so even in death. Both killed violently, both killed under their own walls, both slain with treason in their mouths, both slain in the entrance of a changed government; one trode on by the horses, the other slain in the horsegate; both paid their own blood for the innocent blood of others.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 17-21.

The Restoration of the Public Worship of Jehovah.

I. Was signalized by formal and impressive covenant. 1. *This covenant recognized the supreme claims of Jehovah.* "And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people" (verse 17). This was a renewal of the national covenant with Israel (Exodus xix.-xxiv; Deut. iv. 6; xxvii. 9) to be unto the Lord "a people of inheritance," by which they solemnly engaged themselves to renounce and root out all idolatry, and set up and maintain God's true worship. When the national conscience has been demoralized by idolatrous practices, it is important to present the supreme claims of God to our homage by the most impressive methods. 2. *This covenant guarded the rights of both ruler and ruled.* "Between the king also and the people." This was a civil covenant whereby the king engaged himself to rule them justly and in the fear of God, and the people obliged themselves to defend and obey him (comp. 2. Sam. v. 2). Government is impossible where the rights and privileges of both ruler and ruled are not duly respected and observed.

II. Ensured the downfall of idolatry (verse 18). This was the logical and necessary consequence of the restoration of the true worship. Athaliah had transplanted idolatry into Judah. She was the first to erect a temple to Baal in the holy city, and plundered the temple of Jehovah to enrich the shrine of her favourite deity. The people looked on aghast at this wanton sacrilege to their sacred fane and daring insult to the God of their fathers; but they were powerless to prevent it; they were held in check by the threats and tyranny of the usurper. Many a pious soul wept in secret because of the prevalent iniquity, and many an anxious prayer was offered for a day of deliverance. And now that day had come. The people, animated by a spirit of righteous indignation, rose against the Baal worshippers, and demolished their idol temple. Jehovah can admit no rival. The idols he shall utterly abolish (Isaiah ii. 18).

No more at Delos or at Delphi now,
Or e'en at mighty Ammon's Libyan shrine,
The white-robed priests before the altar bow,
To slay the victim and to pour the wine,
While gifts of kingdoms round each pillar twine.
Scarce can the classic pilgrim, sweeping free
From fallen architrave the desert vine,
Trace the dim names of their divinity;
Gods of the ruin'd temples, where, oh where are ye?—*Bethune.*

III. Was the guarantee of stability to the throne (verse 19). "It seems to me a great truth," says Carlyle, "that human things cannot stand on selfishness, mechanical utilities, economics, and law courts; that if there be not a religious element in the relations of men, such relations are miserable, and doomed to ruin."

> King-becoming graces
> Are justice, verity, temperance, stableness,
> Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness
> Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude.

Where can such virtues be found, and where be better cultivated, than in the humble and reverent worship of Almighty God? No nation can be permanent or prosperous where king and people ignore the obvious claims of Divine worship.

> Safety and equal government are things
> Which subjects make as happy as their kings.—*Waller.*

IV. Was the occasion of national joy and tranquility. "And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet" (verse 20). The good rejoiced that the character of Jehovah was at length vindicated: their sighs, their tears, their prayers for Zion had not been in vain. The aged rejoiced that before their eyes closed in death they beheld their country free from the oppressor, and their loved worship once more restored. The young rejoiced in the brightening prospect of noblest service for God and king and country. "And the city was in quiet." As in many other countries, the condition of the metropolis ruled the provinces. If Jerusalem was in anguish, the nation was in sorrow; if Jerusalem was happy, the nation shared the joy. If the vast populations of our great cities were penetrated with a love and enthusiasm for the worship of Jehovah, how readily would the rest of the country be won over to share in a like experience! It is not without significance that the first preachers of the Gospel directed their earliest endeavours to gain a footing in the great populous centres of their day. Flood the cities with light and joy, and the nations will soon be won. Then will come the time of which Alford sung—

> What throbbings of deep joy
> Pulsate through all I see; from the full bud
> Whose unctuous sheath is glittering in the moon,
> Up through the system of created things,
> Even to the flaming ranks of Seraphim!

LESSONS:—1. *The nation is a prey to anarchy when God is not publicly acknowledged.* 2. *The pure worship of God tends to develop all that is best in national character.* 3. *To worship God aright, we must get rid of every idolatrous rival.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 17, 18. Covenanting with God. I. All the more necessary when conscious of unfaithfulness. II. Should be solemn and impressive. III. Shown to be sincere by the destruction of that which led the soul astray. IV. Has a tendency to foster and strengthen right relations between God and king and people.

Verse 17. The covenant which Jehoiada renewed. I. *The covenant of the king and the people with God.* The basis and fountain of all national prosperity. An irreligious state is a folly and an impossibility. It is nothing. II. *The covenant between king and people.* It is built upon the former. There is prosperity in a country only when the prince rules before and with God, and the people are obedient through obedience to

God. Without this fundamental condition all constitutions, laws, and institutions, however good they may appear, are useless. No relation of subjects and ruler is sound if it has not the covenant of God as its basis on either side.—*Lange.*

Verse 18. It is a grand national event when a people destroys its idols. He who stands by God and his word tolerates neither gross nor refined idolatry. Where there is decided faith in the living God, the altars of the false gods fall of themselves.

Verse 20. National joy. I. May well be expressed when the throne is settled on a stable foundation. II. When religion triumphs over idolatry, oppression, and wrong. III. When peace and prosperity are guaranteed.

O beauteous peace,
Sweet union of a state! What else but thou
Gives safety, strength, and glory to a people.

Governments which are founded in blood always end disastrously.

Verse 21. The sceptre of Judah is changed from a woman to a child; but a child trained up and tutored by Jehoiada. This minority so guided was not inferior to the mature age of many predecessors. Happy is that land the nonage of whose prince falls into holy and just hands.—*Bp. Hall.*

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE BY JOASH.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 2. **Jehoash did right all his days wherein Jehoiada, &c.**—The word "wherein" may be rendered *because*, and that alters the meaning from *during the period in which* Jehoiada instructed him, into "all his days," *i. e., during the king's entire life, because* Jehoiada instructed him. This difference of meaning depends on the preservation or rejection of the suffix ן in the word יְכִיהוּ. The account, however, in the Chronicles is, that Jehoash acted rightly "all the days of Jehoiada the priest." But the grammatical construction of the sentence in Kings requires אֲשֶׁר *because*, rather than "wherein." Verse 3. **But the high places were not taken away**—See Notes on 1 Kings iii. 2. Consider the popular fondness for the evil practices, the youthfulness of the king, and the sanction given to all such idolatrous iniquities during the evil sway of Athaliah, and this inability to suppress so gross an impiety is not unaccountable. Verse 4. **All the money of the dedicated things**—*i. e., consecrated* money; and it is specified as threefold: 1. *Money of the numbered* (so read the words), viz., those who pass through the enumeration (see Exod. xxx. 12-14). 2. *Money of the estimation*, viz., the redemption price of a person who had devoted himself or his property to the Lord, and wished to effect his or its redemption (Lev. xxvii. 1-8). 3. *Freewill offerings.* Verse 7. **Why repair ye not the breaches of the house?**—The natural interpretation of the failure is that the priests had been negligent, and that the money paid in liquidation of vows, and the voluntary gifts of the people, had been *used for other purposes* than those the king intended. But that the king consulted these priests concerning a new method indicates that he did not regard them as guilty of embezzlement. The case probably was, that the current expenses of the maintenance of the priests and of the temple worship absorbed all the finances, *leaving no surplus for repairs.* Yet they ought to have *shown more zeal*, and this is to their reproach. Verse 9. **Jehoiada took a chest**—A scheme for *preserving the account for repairs separate* from the current and incidental expenses. The people welcomed the arrangement (2 Chron. xxiv. 9, 10), for they knew now that their gifts would go to their intended purposes. Verse 10. **They put it in bags, and told the money**—The king sent his own secretary, together with a scribe of the high priest, that the money might be counted. It was then handed to the overseers, who directed the work of repairs. In Oriental countries money is still counted, put in bags, labelled, and sealed by a duly authorized officer, and then passed into currency. Verse 13. **Howbeit there were not made bowls, &c.**—Until the repairs were completed, this money was not used for necessary articles of temple furniture. Verse 15. **They reckoned not with the men**—Their integrity being beyond suspicion. Verse 16. **It was the priests**—According to direct enact-

ment (Lev. v. 16; Numb. v. 8). Verse 17. Hazael, king of Syria, fought against Gath—Gath, formerly a town of the Philistines. According to Chronicles, the expedition against *Jerusalem* occurred in the last year of Jehoash's reign, and it is there marked that this was a punishment from the Lord for the king's unfaithfulness to Him, and his cruelty to the prophet Zechariah. To secure Jerusalem, the king purchased the withdrawal of the Syrians with the treasures of God's house. Verse 20. His servants arose and slew Jehoash—He was at the time in his bed with wounds, probably received in battle with the Syrians. *Comp.* the account in Chronicles.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-3.

The Worth of Godly Counsel.

I. That godly counsel is a powerful help to a consistent and upright life. "And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" There is nothing in the history to lead us to suspect the sincerity of Jehoash's religious devotion in the earlier years of his reign. He was carefully instructed in his infancy, and grew up in the midst of godly influences. His religious character was moulded under the wise and capable counsel of good Jehoiada. It is an unspeakable advantage to grow up under the fostering shelter of a good and holy life. A few words of warning or encouragement at the right moment have often saved a soul from ruin. "Good counsels observed are chains to grace which, neglected, prove halters to strange undutiful children." Sometimes bad men will give good advice, and the man who can take it and act upon it shows his good sense and superiority. He who is wise enough in youth to take the advice of his seniors, unites the vivacity and enterprise of early, with the wisdom and gravity of later, life.

II. That godly counsel is potent with some only when under the direct influence of a living personal example. "All his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him." While Jehoiada lived, Joash faithfully observed the covenant he had made with Jehovah, and, though the fact is not stated, it is implied that he afterwards departed from the counsels of his benefactor. This defection is related in the Chronicles. It is difficult to do wrong in the presence of the good; their holy and upright example is a rebuke and a deterrent to every evil tendency. The influence of Samuel was a powerful check upon the impulsive rashness and violence of Saul; and when that influence was withdrawn, it is not difficult to trace the degeneracy of the unhappy monarch, and how speedily he came to his doom. We shall never know how much we owe to the holy and consistent lives of those with whom we come in frequent contact. "A virtuous man," says Fellthan, "shining in the purity of a righteous life, is a light-house set by the seaside, whereby the mariners both sail aright and avoid danger; but he that lives in noted sins is a false lantern which shipwrecks those that trust him. Nothing awakens our sleeping virtues like the noble acts of our predecessors. They are flaming beacons that fame and time have set on hills to call us to a defence of virtue whensoever vice invades the commonwealth of man." We all need the encouraging influence of example; but there are some natures so feeble in moral stamina that they cannot stand alone. They have been so accustomed to depend upon others, that when their adviser fails them, they succumb. It would seem Joash's was such a nature.

III. That godly counsel does not always avail to bring about the thorough reform of long standing abuses. "But the high places were not taken away" (verse 3). The popular fondness for the private and disorderly rites performed in the groves and recesses of hills was so inveterate that even

the most powerful monarchs had been unable to accomplish their suppression; no wonder that in the early reign of a young king, and after the gross irregularities that had been allowed during the mal-administration of Athaliah, the difficulty of putting an end to the superstitions associated with the high places was greatly increased (Jamieson). Besides, Jehoiada, while acting with surprising energy in the restoration of the dynasty, was an old man—a hundred years old when Joash was crowned, and he lived thirty years after. He might therefore feel himself unable to cope with the demolition of long-established customs that had baffled and defied younger and stronger men. If his counsel halted at this point, it was so far defective. He knew the danger to Judah of these idolatrous practices, and should not only have counselled their extinction, but have had the courage of carrying out what he counselled. The unreformed abuses were a snare to the people in after years, and, as the sequel showed, led to the ruin of the king whose career begun so auspiciously.

LESSONS:—1. *They who give counsel to others should be exemplary themselves.* 2. *It is the mark of a noble nature to receive counsel and profit by it without taking offence.* 3. *We should be prepared to carry out to its consequences the counsel we give to others.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-3. That which appears to be the greatest misfortune for a child, to be left fatherless and motherless at an early age, often becomes a great blessing in the gracious providence of God. What would have become of Jehoash if he had been brought up at the court of his idolatrous father and his depraved mother? God gave him in Jehoiada far more than he had lost in his father and his mother. None need instruction more than those who are called to govern; there is no more responsible calling than that of instructing those who will have to rule. Unfortunately, this task is rarely intrusted to those who, like Jehoiada, are fitted for it by age, learning, experience, and piety.

Verse 2. A faithful teacher. I. A great boon to a young and inexperienced king. II. Has the opportunity of exerting a potent and widespread influence for good. III. Is all the more powerful when associated with a consistent religious character.

— The part played by Jehoiada raised the priesthood to an importance which, with the single exception of Eli, it had never before attained in the history of the Jewish nation, and which it never afterwards altogether lost. Through the priesthood the lineage of David had been saved, and the worship of Jehovah restored in Judah even more successfully than it had been in Samaria through the prophets. During the minority of Joash, Jehoiada virtually reigned. The very office was in some sense created by himself. He was regarded as a second founder of the Order, so that in after days he, rather than Aaron, is described as the chief (Jer. xxix. 26).—*Stanley.*

— A statesman, we are told, should follow public opinion. Doubtless as a coachman follows his horses, having firm hold on the reins, and guiding them.—*Hare.*

Verse 3. The inveterate evils of idolatry. I. Have a powerful ally in the corruptions of human nature. II. Are the occasion of worse evils in the future. III. Survive the most violent efforts of reform. IV. Can be cured only by thorough eradication.

— Even these holy and just hands came short of what they might have done. The high places remained still: those altars were erected to the true God, but in a wrong place. It is a marvel if there be not some blemishes

found in the best government. I doubt Jehoiada shall once buy it dear that he did not his utmost.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Custom had so prevailed that Jehoiada durst not advise the king to cross the people in this superstition, lest it should cause a tumult; lest they should more regard commotioners than commissioners, and be more guided by rage than by right—violence and obstinacy, like two untamed horses, drawing their desires in a blind-fold career, as it fell out in England when King Edward VI. began to reform.—*Trapp.*

— Rulers ought not to allow themselves to be restrained from carrying out what is good and r ght from any fear of persons, lest they may possibly incur the disfavour of the people. There never was a prince who was not himself guilty of faults and errors, as we see here from the example of Jehoash, who did not abolish the sacrifices on the high places.—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 4-16.

The Restoration of the House of God a Work of Genuine Piety.

The prominence given in the history to the repair of the Temple by Joash indicates that it was the chief incident of his reign. As David was the founder, and Solomon the builder, of the House of Jehovah, so Joash, with whom the house of David recommenced, was the restorer of the Sanctuary. It must have been an act of gratitude and joy on the part of the king to repair the breaches of that temple which had been his shelter and home from his tenderest years. He engaged the priests and people in the work, to give to the movement a national character, and to give this outward proof that the king and people were sincere in renewing their covenant with Jehovah. Observe—

I. That the restoration of the house of God may be delayed by the indifference of those who might be supposed most anxious for its promotion (verses 4-6). The work was committed to the priests, who would naturally be expected to be most interested in hastening its completion; but in this both king and people were disappointed. Years rolled away, and nothing was done. It does not appear that the priests can be charged with any intention to misappropriate the money; but it is evident that there was gross mismanagement and neglect somewhere. It is a painful spectacle when the officers of the temple are apathetic as to its condition, and disappoint the expectations of those who have cheerfully offered their help; worse still when the gifts of the people are wrongfully applied. There are those in the churches to-day who imbibe too much of the spirit of these priests. They would see the sanctuary almost tumble about their heads in ruins before they would initiate any movement to repair and renovate it, and would do all they could to debar others from working in that direction. Piety is at a low ebb in that soul which is so indifferent to the outer fabric of God's house.

II. That the restoration of the house of God is a work worthy of a monarch's zeal (verse 7). The soul of David burned with a holy and fervent desire to build a house for God; but he was permitted to do nothing more than prepare for it. The climax of Solomon's great works was the building and dedication of the Temple, and now Joash regards it as an honour and privilege to repair the dilapi ations of that sacred fane. He stirred up the zeal of his aged instructor, rebuked the priests for their supineness and negligence, and organized the enterprise on a sound and popular basis. It is a work befitting a king to be concerned in the honour and beauty of God's house. The prince who is interested in the religious welfare of his people will not be inattentive to inferior matters.

III. **That the restoration of the house of God is accomplished only by resolute and united effort.** 1. *By the willing and liberal offerings of the people* Money is a talent, not to be squandered in reckless extravagance, but to be wisely and discreetly employed. It cannot be better employed than in connection with the house of God. The gift, to be acceptable, must be voluntarily and cheerfully offered: "All the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the Lord" (verse 4). Where this spirit of generosity prevails there is no difficulty in carrying out great religious undertakings. "The manner of giving," says Lavater, "shows the character of the giver more than the gift itself."

> The truly generous is the truly wise;
> And he who loves not others, lives unblest.

2. *By the strict and impartial administration of funds* (verses 9-12). The mismanagement of the priests had brought the work into discredit, and checked the flow of offerings into the church treasury. All this was altered. An offertory chest was especially provided; to show that the priests were not regarded as intentionally dishonest in the misappropriation of previous gifts the chest was placed under their care. At stated times it was opened, the money counted in the presence of the high priest and the king's secretary, and handed over in definite sums to those who had charge of the work. Public confidence was restored, and the people gave cheerfully of their substance. "Put it out of the power of truth to give you an ill character, and if anybody reports you not to be an honest man, let your practice give him the lie; and to make all sure, you should resolve to live no longer than you can live honestly, for it is better to be nothing, than a knave. An honest death is better than a dishonest life." 3. *By the judicious avoidance of unnecessary expense* (verse 13). Vessels of silver and gold were afterwards provided (2 Chron. xxiv. 14); but not until the substantial part of the restoration was completed. Utility and beauty are not antagonistic, but may be gracefully combined.

> Thou shalt learn
> The wisdom early to discern
> True beauty in utility.—*Longfellow.*

To spend money in decoration and display to the neglect of actual and immediate necessities is an unjustifiable extravagance. 4. *By the conscientious and faithful labour of the workmen* (verses 14, 15). A vigorous administration makes itself felt in every detail of the work it undertakes, and communicates its own enthusiasm to the humblest worker. It gives a dignity to labour when it is done conscientiously, and from the love of it. "Where love is, there is no labour; and if there be labour, that labour is loved." In this re-organization of the restoration movement we observe all the elements of success—prompt decided action, generous giving, careful but not stinted expenditure, earnest and united toil. Addison writes: "If you wish success in life, make perseverance your bosom friend, experience your wise counsellor, caution your elder brother, and hope your guardian genius."

IV. **That the restoration of the house of God does not interfere with the necessary maintenance of the duly appointed servants of that house** (verse 16). The priests had surrendered in favour of the restoration fund much of what they had been accustomed to receive (verse 8), but the revenue from the trespass offerings and sin offerings was still given to them. This belonged to them by law (Num. v. 8-9, Levit. v. 16). The due maintenance of the ministry is divinely authorized. The necessities of one branch of the service of God ought not to interfere with the claims of another. The minister of God should be so provided for as to raise him above all anxieties that would divert his mind from complete devotion to his proper work.

LESSONS:—1. *The house of God is not only a convenience for worshippers, but also a public witness for religion.* 2. *The building of a house of God calls for the liberality and united zeal of His people.* 3. *Suggests the need of continued effort in building up the spiritual temple.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 4. The responsibility of wealth. I. Not to be used for personal aggrandisement and indulgence. II. Is most nobly employed in promoting the worship of God. III. Should be offered to God with a liberal hand and a cheerful heart.

Verse 5. The decay of God's house a symptom of moral decay. I. Shows the prevalence of a worldly and selfish spirit. II. Shows an indifference to the highest claims of God and the soul. III. An evidence of national deterioration. IV. Calls for repentance and reformation.

— When the building in which a congregation assembles to worship God, to hear His word, and to receive the means of grace, is left ruinous, God does not receive the honour which belongs to Him. Where the churches fall to ruin, there religion and piety also fall into decay; but where there is love of God and joy in His word, there no ruinous churches are seen. A time in which magnificent palaces, theatres, and ball-rooms are repaired, or built at great expense, but in which the houses of God are left small, wretched, dirty, and ruinous, is a time of religious decay, and resembles the time of Athaliah in Judah. The spiritual temple may in time become ruinous through unbelief, worldly life and behaviour, and immorality. Where are the congregations in which there is nothing ruinous or decayed, in which nothing could be improved? How many are in ruins and ready to fall!—*Lange.*

Verses 7-15. Thorough organization an aid to success. I. Emphasizes the importance of the work to be done. II. Interests and engages all classes of the community. III. Adopts the best methods to elicit the generosity of the people. IV. Creates confidence as to the just administration of the funds. V. Reacts upon the enthusiasm and fidelity of all engaged in the work.

Verse 7. "Why repair ye not the breaches of the house?" A searching question. I. Addressed to the wealthy. II. To all the worshippers of Jehovah. III. To all unfaithful ministers. IV. To imperfect believers.

— Works which are pleasing to God cannot be accomplished by careless hands. They are only accomplished where zeal is united with perseverance, patience, and fidelity. How many a congregation has fallen into decay and remained so, because those who were appointed to be the builders of it, who ought to have repaired and built it, have not raised their negligent hands (Heb. xii. 12; Jerem. xlviii. 10). Although no earthly king may ever call them to account, yet the Heavenly King, before whose judgment-seat they must appear to give an account of their office, will ask—"Why repair ye not the breaches of the house?"

Verse 13. The necessary precedes the ornamental. I. It is so in the economy of nature. II. Should be so in the house of God. III. Should be so in the arrangements of social life. IV. The ornamental is not condemned in itself—only when it supersedes and ignores the necessary and useful.

— **The utilitarian.** He is a slave to science. He would pull—

Great heaven to pieces, and anatomize
Each fragment of its crystal battlements,
Weigh out its hymns, divide its light, and class
The radiant feathers of archangels' wings.
Do we not know—doth he not know—that still
Mysterious wonder aye must reign above us,

Struggle howe'er we may? Doth he not know
That adoration and great wonder, like
Good deeds which bless the giver, ever lift
The soul above the dust, and strengthen us?
Cornwall.

Verse 16. **Ministerial maintenance.** I. Authorized by the Word of God. II. A just arrangement. III. Not to be interfered with by other claims.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 17—21.

The Unhappy Fate of an Unfaithful King.

After the death of Jehoiada the career of Joash was a series of disasters. He became unfaithful to his covenant vows, and was seduced into idolatry. Having forsaken Jehovah, he was abandoned to his courses, and soon became a prey to his own evil passions and to the enemies who swooped down upon him with deadly intent.

I. His kingdom is harassed with war and rapine (verse 17). The Syrians invaded his dominions, and, though insignificant in number, wrought much slaughter, and bore away great spoil. Under the pious rule of the good Jehoiada the nation was in peace, and grew in prosperity and riches. The nation that turns its back on Jehovah will not go unpunished. It is no wonder if it is smitten with the scourge of war and all its attendant woes. "War," says Luther, "is one of the greatest plagues that can afflict humanity. It destroys religion, it destroys states, it destroys families. Any scourge, in fact, is preferable to it. Famine and pestilence become as nothing in comparison with it. Pestilence is the least evil of the three, and 'twas therefore David chose it, willing rather to fall into the hands of God, than into those of pitiless man." War is the sink of all injustice.

II. He is demoralized with cowardice and fear (verse 18). Instead of rallying his forces and meeting the enemy with a brave, determined spirit, Joash weakly yielded, and even despoiled the House of God of its valuables, and sacred vessels to bribe the Syrian king to withdraw. Conscious unfaithfulness is the parent of craven fear.

Cowards die many times before their death;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that man should fear,
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.—*Shakespeare.*

III. His life is hurried to an untimely and ignominious end (verses 20-21). Joash is smitten with disease, and yet, as if this was too slow a process to end his wretched life, a conspiracy was formed, and he was quickly despatched with the assassin's sword. His murder of the son of his benefactor met with a speedy retribution. His ignominy did not end with his death. To show the popular execration in which he was held, his body was refused burial in the sepulchre of the kings—a terrible warning as to the fate of all apostates. Another illustration of how dark and dismal a night may settle upon a life that opened with so fair and hopeful a morning.

Lessons:—1.—*It is a fatal step to reject the pious counsels and training of one's youth.* 2. *A king cannot go wrong without involving a nation in suffering.* 3. *No rank in life can screen the evil-doer from punishment.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 17-21. The best instruction cannot preserve against a fall if the heart is not firm and strong. Only he who endures unto the end shall be saved. The noblest commencement is vain, if the end is perverse and wicked. Joash was taught what calamities it brings to abandon the Lord God (Jer. ii. 19). The Lord rewards everyone according to his works, whether in this or the next world. What a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Joash was marvellously preserved as an infant; he ends his life wretchedly. This is an example how near the ruin of a man is when he abandons the good to which he was educated from his youth up, nay, even is glad to be rid of those who annoy him by their warnings.—*Lange.*

Verse 18. A cowardly spirit. I. A result of conscious infidelity. II. Weakly succumbs even to an inferior force. III. Has no scruples as to how money is raised wherewith to bribe an enemy. IV. Is despised by its oppressor. V. Encourages a renewal of hostilities.

Verses 20, 21. All the people shouted to the child-king, "Long live the king!" and rejoiced and blew trumpets. Conspiracy and murder were the end of his forty years' reign!

Verse 20. Assassination. I. A symptom of national discontent. II. A dastardly and brutal method of revenge. III. Brings no advantage to the parties concerned in it.

Verse 21. He that was guilty of abominable idolatry, yet, as if God meant to waive that challenge, is called to reckoning for his cruel unthankfulness to Jehoiada. This crime shall make him odious alive, and shall abandon him dead from the sepulchre of his fathers, as if this last royalty were too good for him who had forgotten the law of humanity. Some vices are such as nature smiles upon, though frowned at by Divine justice; others are such as even nature itself abhors. Such is this of ingratitude, which therefore carries so much more detestation from God, as it is more odious even to them who have blotted out the image of God.—*Bp. Hall.*

— So ended the last remains of the great struggle of the house of Omri for power. So was preserved the house of David through the fiercest struggles, inward and outward, that it witnessed till its final overthrow. So was confirmed the establishment of the priesthood in the heart of the monarchy.—*Stanley.*

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEATH OF ELISHA.

Critical and Explanatory Notes.—Verse 1. **Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, began to reign over Israel**—Here the historian turns from the records of *Judah* to those of *Israel.* The date—"three and twentieth year"—does not accord by two years with that given in verse 10, as the corresponding year of the reign of Joash [or Jehoash], king of Judah; but copyist's blunders in Hebrew numerals occurred so easily. Verse 4. **The Lord saw the oppression of Israel**—He allowed the Syrians to become His scourge for Israel's guilt in apostatizing from His worship. Verse 5. **The Lord gave Israel a saviour**—Not a *supernatural* saviour—angel or prophet—but in both the kings Joash and Jeroboam He gave them a מוֹשִׁיעַ, "saviour," from the Syrians, for the former recovered all the lost cities (verse 25), and the latter restored all the old boundaries of Israel (xiv. 25). Verse 6. **But walked therein**—Who? *Jeroboam*

or *Israel?* בָּהּ הָלַךְ—"walked he" (Jeroboam), or "walked it" (Israel). **There remained the grove**—*Comp.* 1 Kings xvi. 33. Verse 14. **Elisha was fallen sick**—The prophet's presence was felt by Joash to be a guarantee of the safety of his kingdom, and he dreaded to lose him, fearing that after the prophet's death he must again confront the destructive Syrians, and therefore cries, My father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof! It implies the king's conviction that this man of God had been, by his counsels and prayers, *the secret of Israel's valour and victories.* Verse 17. **The arrow of the Lord's deliverance**, &c.—War was then significantly proclaimed by an arrow or war-missel being shot into the enemy's country. By the prophet's putting his hands upon the king's hands (verse 16) he indicated the *supernatural* power which would go with the king in his invasion of Syria. The Syrians had established themselves in *the East*, therefore the arrow was shot Eastward (verse 17). Verse 18. **Smite upon the ground**—As a symbolic act of subjugation. The king did not use up all the arrows in the quiver. Why? Perhaps because he obeyed the theory that what was done *thrice* was done efficiently and absolutely; or, possibly, because he *lacked in persistency.* The latter; for Elisha's command, "*Take the arrows; smite!*" implies with *all* the arrows; but he stopped on his own accord. A bad omen. Verse 19. **The man of God was wroth with him**—For the king thereby predicted his incomplete conquest. Verse 20. **Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year**—בְּא שָׁנָה—*lit., a year came*; but it may be interpreted as the Spring season, in ancient times the usual period for opening campaigns or commencing invasions. Verse 21. **As they were burying a man**, &c.—*i. e.*, a corpse of some unknown person about to be interred in the same burial place in which Elisha's sepulchre was situate. The sudden appearance of one of these Moabite hordes urged them to cast the body hastily into the grave of Elisha, which, if not open, was quickly accessible by removing the stone from its mouth. Verse 25. **Three times did Joash beat him**—*i. e.*, Benhadad, the son of Hazael; according to the number of arrows he shot (verse 19).—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-13.

National Decay.

In this paragraph we have grouped together the history of the two sister kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Their condition is alike. They are both dragged down to the same level. The same evil that has been so fatal to Samaria is now prevalent in Jerusalem. The same dark record is true of both—a record of apostasy, intensified corruption, and rapid decay of national prestige. In the case of Judah, one bright ray relieves the gloom; there are indications of repentance and return; but it seems more a desire to be delivered from calamities that have become intolerable, than a genuine effort to reform. Observe—

I. That national decay is the inevitable result of religious apostasy (verses 2, 3). Religion exalts a nation by exalting the individual. It is equally the basis of private virtue and public faith; of the happiness of the individual and the prosperity of the nation. When God is honoured, the nation is blessed; but when He is forsaken and despised, suffering and disaster follow. "True religion," says Burke, "is the foundation of society. When that is once shaken by contempt, the whole fabric cannot be stable nor lasting." How strikingly is this illustrated in the history of the Jewish kingdom!

II. That national decay is hastened by the devastations of continuous war (verses 3-7). War exhausts the sources of a nation's strength, and destroys its noblest sons. It is a waste of blood and treasure. If it does not utterly obliterate the nation, it puts back for years its progress and advancement. A strong nation may recover with surprising rapidity the damage inflicted by a single war; but the strongest nation cannot long survive the sufferings of uninterrupted warfare. Nor is it always evident which suffers most—the

victorious or the vanquished. No greater calamity can happen to a nation than to be given up to the horrors and ravages of war.

> Oh world!
> Oh men! what are ye, and our best designs,
> That we must work by crime to punish crime,
> And slay, as if death had but this one gate?—*Byron.*

III. That national decay may be arrested for a time by humiliation and prayer (verses 4, 5). We may here trace the influence of Elisha upon king Jehoahaz. It was a familiar teaching in the lips of the prophet that the nation's troubles were brought about by forsaking God, and the only way of deliverance was to be found in returning to Him in penitence and prayer. "Jehoahaz besought the Lord, and the Lord hearkened unto him." The grip of the Syrian was relaxed, the terror of war passed away, and once more peace and security were restored. The Lord has no pleasure in sights of suffering, even where suffering is most deserved. His compassion is touched with the cry of the helpless, and He is swift to save.

> More things are wrought by prayer
> Than this world dreams of.
> For what are men better than sheep or goats,
> That nourish a blind life within the brain,
> If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
> Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
> For so the whole round world is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.—*Tennyson.*

IV. That national decay cannot be prevented while temptations to apostasy are allowed to exist. "There remained the grove also in Samaria (verse 6). The incompleteness of the reforming work of the father became a snare to the son (chap. x. 29). The seductions of idolatry led the people away from the worship of Jehovah, and from the path of virtue and uprightness. No nation can rise to its true purity and strength until every public enticement to evil is abolished. There is no safety with idols, but in their destruction.

> Still they plead and still they promise; wilt thou suffer them to stand?
> They have pleasures, gifts, and treasures, to enrich thee, at command.
> Heed not thou, but boldly strike them; let descend the faithful blow.
> From their wreck and from their ruin first will thy true riches flow.—*Trench.*

LESSONS:—1. *The blessing of God is the strength and glory of a nation.* 2. *When that blessing is forfeited by unfaithfulness the nation sinks into ruin* 3. *Prayer for Divine help should be followed by reformation of life.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 2, 3, 11. **A bad example.** I. Transmits its baneful influence to succeeding generations. II. Is all the more potent for evil when found in persons in the highest station. III. Is no excuse for any who do evil—does not absolve from personal responsibility. IV. Rouses the anger of God against all who imitate it. V. Cannot be followed without suffering and chastisement.

Verse 4. **Adversity.** I. A sharp spur to devotion. II. Appeals to the Divine compassion. III. Affords an opportunity for the gracious exercise of Divine power.

— The house of correction is the

fittest hospital for those cripples whose legs are lame through their own laziness.—*Fuller.*

God alone
Instructeth how to mourn. He doth not trust
This higher lesson to a voice or hand
Subordinate. Behold! He cometh forth!
O sweet disciple—bow thyself to learn
The alphabet of tears.—*Sigourney.*

— Prayer—I. An evidence of repentance. II. Should be addressed to the Being whom we have offended. III. Secures the Divine compassion and help. IV. The best method of obtaining victory over our enemies.

— Repentance is God's choicest and deepest gift; repentance for our habitual dreariness and coldness, for that shallowness of heart which overtakes us when we are surrounded with the tokens of His presence, when we are partakers of the ordinances of His grace; which those very privileges seem to produce in us; from which troubles, individual or national, cannot of themselves deliver us. Divines may have infinite refinements about the mode, degrees, and effect of repentance. That one phrase of Scripture, "turning to God," contains all that we can say of it. Man, thou art living, moving, having thy being in One whom thou art habitually forgetting. That forgetfulness makes thee forget thy brethren; yea, and in the truest sense forget thyself. Thou dost not know what thou art, whither thou art tending. All the earth is a riddle to thee. Thy fellowmen are hindrances in thy way. Thou art thine own great curse and terror. Recollect from whom come the thoughts and impulses of the mind and will within thee; who can make those thoughts and impulses an order instead of a chaos. Turn round to the light which is ever sending flashes into the midst of thy darkness. Ask that instead of such momentary appearances, from which thou shrinkest as from a guilty thing surprised, it may penetrate thee and possess thee, and become thy constant habitation. When thou yieldest thyself to its transforming energy, thou wilt not bear to see the earth lying crushed under the weight of its sins and oppressions. Thou wilt believe in thy heart and declare with thy lips that in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, in the church which God has set up, in the people who believe in His love, there is a prophecy of deliverance for the universe.—*F. D. Maurice.*

Verse 5. The Lord gave Israel a temporal saviour in its hour of physical need; to us He has given a spiritual Saviour, who can and will save us out of the hands of the greatest of all our enemies. Many a one prays, like Jehoahaz, in his time of distress; and when the trouble is past, the good impulses quickly disappear.

Verse 7. No nation is so great and mighty that God cannot take away its might, and make it so small and slight that it is only like dust which the wind scatters (Ps. xviii. 42).—*Lange.*

Verse 12. War-like valour. I. Not the highest kind of valour. II. Called into exercise by the extremities of a nation. III. Is of no avail when opposed to Divine chastisements.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 14-19.

Salvation the All-absorbing Theme of a True Prophet.

I. It is a theme on which he delights to dwell in his dying moments. The ministry of Elisha was one of peace and good will. He sought to build up rather than to destroy. He loved to speak of mercy and deliverance rather than of wrath and destruction. He had witnessed the sins of Israel, and had faithfully denounced them. He saw and grieved over the sufferings that had come upon the nation. And now, worn down with age and disease, and rapidly

approaching the end of his career, his last message is one of hope and salvation. The theme of his youth had lost none of its freshness and power in his old age. The herald of salvation cannot close his career more grandly than in proclaiming his loved message with his dying lips:

"Happy, if with my latest breath
I may but gasp His name;
Preach Him to all, and cry in death,
Behold, behold the Lamb!"

II. It is a theme which raises his own character into dignity and power. "The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." This seemed to mean that Elisha was regarded as the strength and protection of Israel. "What use there was of chariots and horsemen in those wars of the ancients all history tells us. All the strength of the battle stood in these; there could be neither defence nor offence but by them. Such was Elisha unto Israel. The greatest safeguard to any nation is the sanctity and faithfulness of their prophets, without which the church and state lie open to utter desolation." And there is that in the truths which a faithful minister declares which re-acts upon and elevates his own character. The diligent student becomes great by the greatness of the truths he studies. He becomes familiar with great ideas, and is purified and strengthened by the Divine spirit that lives and breathes in them. The grand elements of greatness and power are found in closest communion with God and truth.

III. It is a theme illustrated by suggestive symbols. (Verses 15-19). In these symbols we are taught: 1. *That salvation is from the Lord.* Elisha directed Joash to take bow and arrows as a symbolical act designed to intimate more fully and significantly the victories promised to the king of Israel over the Syrians. His laying his hands upon the king's hands was to represent the power imparted to the bow-shot as coming from the Lord through the medium of the prophet. Salvation is not by armies, or by the subtlety of human diplomacy, but of God, who can save by many or by few. "Salvation is the confluence of every attribute in Deity, extinguishing by contrast whatever else was splendid, while God himself effused the sparkles of heaven upon the question of despair, and dissolved the darkness of human destiny in a flood of everlasting light!" 2. *That the measure of salvation is limited by our faith.* Joash's shooting the other arrows into the ground was in token of the number of victories he was to gain; but his stopping at the third betrayed the weakness of his faith; for as the discharged arrow signified a victory over the Syrians, it is evident that the more arrows he shot, the more victories he would gain; and as he stopped so soon, his conquest would be incomplete. Faith in God is the measure, and unbelief the limit, of His blessings. "According to your faith be it unto you."

LESSONS:—1. *The chief joy of a true prophet is to proclaim deliverance to the oppressed.* 2. *That a true prophet is ennobled by the spirit of his message.* 3. *That Jehovah carries on His work of salvation by human agencies.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 14. A touching death-bed scene. I. A young, healthy, vigorous king weeping in the presence of an aged, venerable, and dying saint. II. The tears of the monarch bore eloquent testimony to the worth and power of the dying prophet. III. Counsels given under such circumstances carry with them a weight and solemnity that cannot be forgotten.

— The longest day must have its evening. Good Elisha, who had lived some ninety years, a wonder of prophets, and had out-worn many successions in the thrones of Israel and Judah, is now cast upon the bed of his sickness, yea, of his death. That very age might seem a disease, which yet is seconded with a languishing distemper. It is not in the power of any holiness to privilege us from infirmity of body, from final dissolution. He saw his master Elijah rapt up suddenly from the earth and fetched by a fiery chariot from this vale of mortality—himself must leisurely wait for his last pangs in a lingering passage to the same glory. There is not one way appointed to us by the Divine Providence unto one common blessedness; one hath more pain, another hath more speed; violence snatcheth away one, another by an insensible pace draws every day nearer to his term. The wisdom and goodness of God magnifies itself in both. Happy is he, who, after due preparation, is passed through the gates of death ere he be aware! Happy is he, who, by the holy use of long sickness, is taught to see the gates of death afar off and addressed for a resolute passage. The one dies like Elijah, the other like Elisha—both blessedly.—*Bp. Hall.*

— O, thou, who canst do more by thy prayers than all the soldiers can with their weapons of war! Elisha's piety and prayers were the strength of the state, as this wicked king could now acknowledge with tears, though before he had slighted him. Stapleton says that he called Elisha "the horsemen" of Israel, because by his holy life and doctrine he led all Israel; and "the chariot," because by his virtue and prayers he preserved the people, that God destroyed them not for their sins. The death of such is very ominous, a forerunner of great calamities.—*Trapp.*

— The death of godly ministers a subject for lamentation.—Death reduces all things to their proper level. Circumstances and characters never find their just estimate until the shadows of mortality have abated the glare of life, and its chills have tempered the fluctuating state of life. On this occasion, what is the crown of Israel to the dying prophet? Death brought the purple of the monarch into contact with the coarse garment of the prophet. The prophet under that dispensation was what the minister is now to the church. There is a difference in some respects; but in origin and design the office is one. Times and modes change; but principles are eternal. And thus we may adopt the lamentation of Joash over the expiring Elisha,—"Oh my father, my father, &c." We may be instructed by it in the following particulars. I. **The importance of a faithful minister to the church and the world in his life and in his death.** 1. *The importance of his ministry.* What is there in the world to compete with it? It is to show the ruins of the fall repaired and paradise restored. It is to save souls from death. 2. *The importance of fidelity in it.* Woe unto those who conceal, or deny, or alter, or add to the truth. 3. *The importance of the life of a faithful minister to the church and to the world.* The life will preach when the tongue is silent. Renders his preaching singularly impressive. 4. *The importance of the death of a faithful minister.* Though it does not determine character, what consolation does it afford to the survivors! What a savour of Christianity does it leave behind. The faithful minister is a strong bulwark to those around him. II. **The attention awakened by his removal and the respect due to his memory.** 1. *Israel's chariot and horsemen are departed.* They are immortal till their work is done. Some fall newly green, and others newly grey; and how swiftly are they removed. 2. *Attention is awakened by events like these.* An attention that too often sleeps before. We do not find the attention of Joash awakened before. O! if we were aware we were hearing the last sermon, with what attention should we listen. 3. *There is respect due to the memory of a faithful minister.* This is claimed on every

principle of reason and gratitude. III. The tender recollections of those more immediately connected with him, and the special duties devolving upon them. The king wept. Such intimacies stand connected with every man and with every minister. All the charities of human nature are connected in the sacred office, and called into contact with all its parts. IV. Anticipate the day when all the ravages of death shall be repaired and all the fruits of ministerial usefulness gathered. 1. *Such a day shall come.* A day when the harvest shall be reaped. 2. *The anticipation of this day is solemn, delightful, important.* —*The Pulpit.*

— It is rarely recognised how great and irreparable is the loss of a true man of God, a great benefactor and a faithful servant, until he is gone. King Joash was not ashamed to come to the dying prophet, and to confess with tears his own helplessness; but how many shun such holy men, and are glad if they need never have anything to do with them.—*Lange.*

Verse 15. Here we see Elisha's patriotism. If we would know what true love of one's fatherland is, let us ask the prophet. In his case it received a Divine consecration. It is truly touching to see with what tenderness the prophets enfold in their hearts their country and people, even when they see in them little but spiritual death, decay, and corruption, and experience from their fellow-countrymen little but bitterness, hate, and persecution.—*Krummacher.*

Verse 17. The arrows of the Lord's deliverance. That death-bed scene speaks volumes for the power of holiness. Elisha was the prophet of God—a man of no honourable station, except that he is always honourable whom God calls to serve him. Joash, the king of Israel, who has often rejected Elisha's admonitions, and continued to worship in the groves of Baal, though Elisha had denounced them, now that the prophet is about to die at the good old age of ninety, comes to weep at his bed-side. It was something remarkable for the king to come there at all. Kings do not often visit death-bed scenes, especially the death-beds of God's servants. But it was something more remarkable for that king to stand and look upon the decaying form of the aged prophet, and to weep over his face. More notable still was the language in which the king expressed his sense of the value of the prophet to the state. "O my father! my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" He felt as if now all his strength was cut off. The king had trusted in his cavalry, though he had but a slender force, and he compares the prophet to that which he looked upon as being the strongest arm of his military service; or he looks upon the state now as being a chariot with wild horses, and no stately prophet to stand erect and hold the reins. Now have the reins dropped, and whither will the chariot go? It will soon be overturned, and the mad coursers will drag it hither and hither. So the king, out of a sort of selfish respect for the prophet—for it was respect, and yet it was selfishness—stands and weeps over the prophet's dying bed.

I. Let us consider the significant sign. Israel was at that time engaged in warfare against Syria. As a sign that God intended to give victory to his people, the king is bidden to take the bow and arrows; Elisha, as God's representative, puts his hand upon the king's hands; forthwith the window is opened, and the arrow is shot. As it flies through the air, the prophet says that that arrow is the arrow of the Lord's deliverance of his people out of the hand of Syria. The interpretation of this symbolical act is simple enough. God will save. Deliverance is of the Lord; but it must be accomplished by human instrumentality. Joash must take the bow and arrows; but the hands of Joash cannot make the arrow speed, save as Elisha, the representative of God, puts his hands there. So the man, divinely strengthened by God, shoots the arrow, and

the deliverance comes. We grant you that God can work without means, and even when he uses means, he still takes the glory to himself, for it is all his own; yet it has been the rule, and will be the rule till the day of means shall come to an end, that just as God saved man by taking upon himself man's flesh, so everywhere in the world he calls men by speaking to them through men of their own flesh and blood. We are not to let the arrows lie still, and say, "God will do his own work, Elisha will shoot the arrows." This is idleness; we have had enough of this. Look at those churches which say, "God will do his own work." You will find that the more these people talk about God's doing his own work, the more they sink into a fatal apathy. And when they have entangled brethren whose conversion was effected under other ministry than their own, they talk as if they had been re-converted, and did not know the truth till they had heard the particular, excellent, hot-pressed gospel which they deliver. On the other hand it is an equally dangerous error to suppose that we are to take the arrows and shoot without God. This is, in fact, the more dangerous of the two; although, if I have to compare two devils together, I know not which is the worst of these evil spirits —the spirit which idly says, "Leave it to God," or the spirit which goes about God's work without dependence on him.

II. **Let us censure the slack-handed king.** The prophet gave him the bow and arrows, and bade him shoot down upon the ground. It was left to him. He is bidden to shoot, and he shoots once; he draws his bow and he shoots again; a third time he draws the bow, and then throws it down slack upon the ground. The prophet is angry with him, for he will only have three victories. If he had smitten the ground six times he would have had six victories. The king is to be censured, and censured severely; but as he is dead and gone, and our censure cannot affect him, let us censure those who now imitate him 1. How many believers *have but little faith, and seem quite content to have but that little.* They cannot grasp the promise of God and believingly expect to have it fulfilled. They cannot take God at his word, and therefore their temporal troubles and their spiritual cares press very heavily upon them. Oh, that they had grace to smite the ground six times! Oh, that they knew how to cast all their burden on Him who careth for them! 2. Then you see another class of people who are just the *same as to their knowledge.* They do not understand the deep things of God; they are content to know that which saves the soul from ruin, and the remedy which is provided by Christ, but they let the deep things of God lie still for strong men, but they themselves are content to be babes. 3. You will see these same people, or others like them, *who are content about their daily walk and conversation.* They are not drunkards; they do not swear; they are scrupulously truthful; they commit no breach of the Sabbath day; but when you have said this, you have said about as much as you can say of them. Their religion seems to have made them moral, but it would be difficult to perceive that it has made them holy. These brethren have, in fact, shot three times, and they have smitten the ground once or twice, but they have not made a clean sweep of their besetting sins; they still tolerate some of them; they have not reached to a high point of holiness. 4. So, too, there are many Christians who do not shoot more than three times, inasmuch as *they are content with very low enjoyments.* Shame on us that we are content to be such dwarfs, when we might grow into giants; that we are here frittering away our time, when we might immortalize ourselves and glorify our Lord. How is it we are content to bring forth a lean ear, and then a scanty ear, when there should be seven ears upon one stalk, like the plenty of Egypt. Consider some of the reasons why the king did not shoot more. (1). *Perhaps he felt*

rather tender towards the Syrians. It is just possible that he felt he did not want to hurt them too much. He would be victorious; he would get his enemy under his feet; but, if he did more, he would crush him outright, and he hardly wanted to do that. So some professors do not want to be too hard upon their sins; they have a sort of hidden tenderness towards their own corruptions. (2). Again, perhaps the king did not go on to shoot because *he thought it was hardly his business to be employed as a bowman.* "Why should I stay here for ever," saith he, "shooting arrows? I did not object when the prophet's hand was upon me, to shoot; but to stand here and keep smiting the ground is hardly the occupation for a king." (3). And then the thought, perhaps, *that he should have three victories, and that would be enough.* You do not want to be made good; you do not want to be made Christ-like; you do not want to be able to triumph over your sins; you mistake your high calling; you think you are called to be a slave, when you are called to reign; you fancy you are called to wear sackcloth, when you are bidden to put on scarlet and fine linen; you think that God has called you to a dunghill, whereas He has called you to a throne; you imagine you are to be but here and there the skirmishers in the battle, when He has called you to stand in the front rank and to fight constantly for his cause. (4). The king *may have begun to doubt whether the victories would really come.* He knew very well that he had not many soldiers, and that Syria was very strong, so he thought: "Well, it takes some faith to think that I shall beat them three times; but it is not likely I shall do it in the fourth." He doubted the Divine power and the Divine promise, because of his own weakness; and many Christians do that. (5). And it is very likely *the king despised the prophet's plan.* Why, he seemed to say, this was absurd, smiting the ground in this way! If there were any men to be shot at, he would not spare the arrows; but to smite the ground in this way—absurd! ridiculous! So, too often we miss a blessing because we do not like God's plans.

III. Let us justify the righteous wrath of the prophet. We do not like to see either an old man or a dying man angry; but the prophet here did well to be angry, even though at the hour of death. He loved the people, and wept to think that their king was standing in their light, and robbing them of precious privileges. 1. *How much Israel suffers from the slack-handedness of the king.* Oh, Christians! you suffer yourselves; you miss a thousand comforts. What you might do for God you are unable to do. What you might sit down and feed upon yourselves, you utterly miss, because you will not go on farther, and seek higher attainments: and all your brethren suffer too. 2. *How easy the triumph that might have been achieved!* Why, if this king had shot more arrows, Syria would have been quite overcome, and cut in pieces; but because he was slack in this, Syria waves her proud banner over captive maids and sorrowing widows whose husbands have been slain in battle, and weep in the streets of Samaria. The devil rejoices when he sees slumbering Christians. The world laughs in its sleeve at professors now-a-days. 3. *How Jehovah's name was dishonoured!* In Assyria's streets they laughed at Jehovah; they said that their gods were greater than He. Oh, what a shame it is that you and I should ever put Christ to more shame than he endured for our sakes! Let us bethink ourselves whether we have not been shooting too few arrows; whether we have not thought too much of the little we have been doing; whether we might not have done more. I am sure there is room for great improvement in the best of us. O Lord, what a spark is my love to thee! Oh, that thou wouldest blow it into a flame till it were as coals of juniper!—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

— The arrow shot towards the enemy's country signifies the deliverance which the Lord will soon grant

Israel from the Syrian yoke. The casting of a spear, or shooting of an arrow into an enemy's country was a common signal for the beginning of hostilities. Thus Alexander the Great is said to have hurled a dart into his enemy's land when he came to the borders of the Persian territory.—*Whedon.*

— After the Scythians had laid waste their country before the legions of Darius, and thus reduced the invading army to the greatest distress for want of provisions, they sent an ambassador to the Persian king to present him a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. The ambassador was asked what these presents meant. He answers that he had nothing else in charge but to deliver them, and return with all speed; but that the Persians, if they were ingenious, would discover what interpretation to put upon them. Darius, judging according to his wishes, gave it as his opinion that they were tokens of submission. "The mouse," said he, "being bred in the earth, indicates that they yield up their lands; the frog, living in water, that they yield up also their lakes, rivers, &c.; the bird, represented all the wild and tame fowl; and the delivering up the five arrows was the same with the Scythians as delivering up arms is with other nations." "Alas!" said Gobryas, one of the seven princes who had ejected the magi, "it is far otherwise. For O, Persians! unless as birds ye fly in the air, or as mice ye retreat under the earth, or as frogs ye swim in the water, ye shall never return whence ye came, but shall perish by these arrows." And so in fact it turned out; for it was only by the merest accident that Darius and the whole of the army were not cut off by the Scythians.—*Percy Anecdotes.*

— How readily doth Elisha now make good the words of Joash! How truly is he the chariots and horsemen of Israel! Israel had not fought without him—much less had been victorious. If theirs be the endeavour, the success is his. Even the dying prophet puts life and speed into the forces of Israel; and while he is digging his own grave, is raising trophies to God's people.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Many an "arrow of the Lord" is shot from the lips or looks of a dying saint—*e.g.*, a mother's last appeal, a father's farewell counsel, a friend's request.

Verses 18, 19. **Elisha's reproof to Joash.** Consider: 1. What messages of mercy God has sent to us. 1. *By significant emblems.* 2. *By express promises.* 3. *By the declarations and examples of dying saints.* II. Whence it is that we profit so little by them. The fault is in ourselves alone, just as it was in the king of Israel. 1. *Our desires are faint.* 2. *Our expectations low.* 3. *Our exertions languid.* Conclusion: 1. Improve the opportunities God affords you by his ministers. 2. Trifle not with the impressions which are at any time upon your mind.—*Simeon.*

— Cease not to shoot arrows of love into the heart of God, so shall one arrow of deliverance after another come back from the Lord, and be given to thee in the word of truth. So shalt thou smite thy spiritual foes and tread them under foot, even more completely than Joash did the Syrians. He who is called to execute work for God may not stop and desist according to his own good judgment, but must go on in it tirelessly and faithfully till the Lord commands him to cease. Faith must hold firm until the end. When one battle is won, the conflict is not over. How much is it to be regretted when one only half believes—half obeys; or when one, after a good beginning, desists.—*Lange.*

Verse 19. **The conflict with evil.** I. Should be carried on under the direction of those competent to advise. II. Complete victory can be achieved only by resolute and persevering effort. III. To stop short of complete victory is to entail greater calamity in the future.

— The prophet himself did not yet know how many victories Joash should obtain against the Syrians; but God

had signified to him that he should learn that by the number of the king's strokes; and he was angry with him, not simply because he smote only thrice, but because, by his unbelief and idolatry, he provoked God so to over-rule his heart and hand that he should smite but thrice, which was a token that God would assist him no further, although his smiting but thrice might proceed either from his unbelief or negligence. For, by the former sign, and the prophet's comment upon it, he might clearly perceive that this also was intended as a sign of his success, and, therefore, he ought to have done it frequently and vehemently.—*Pool.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 20, 21.

The Influence of the Great and Good.

I. **Does not terminate with their life.** "And Elisha died, and they buried him;" but they could not bury his influence for good; that is one thing over which death has no power. "There is nothing," writes Dickens, "no, nothing innocent or good, that dies and is forgotten; let us hold to that faith or none. An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it, and play its part through them in the redeeming actions of the world, though its body be burnt to ashes, or drowned in the deepest sea. There is not an angel added to the host of heaven but does its blessed work on earth in those that loved it here. Forgotten! Oh, if the good deeds of human creatures could be traced to their source, how beautiful would even death appear, for how much charity, mercy, and purified affection would be seen to have their growth in dusty graves." The life of Elisha was a precious treasure to the nation; his name could not be forgotten; his deeds shone as the stars of heaven; his power penetrated all ranks, from king to peasant.

II. **Keeps alive the hope of deliverance in the breasts of an oppressed people** (verse 20). The Moabites had partially recovered from the reverses they suffered at the beginning of Elisha's career (ch. iii.), and became strong enough to make an annual predatory incursion. Harassed by Syrian and Moabite, the Israelites might have yielded to despair; but the spirit of the dead prophet sustained them. They loved his memory; they revered his stainless character; they believed his prophecies, and in the darkest hour of oppression and suffering they cherished the hope of deliverance. The influence of a good man lives through many generations, and inspires many to nobler thoughts and more heroic action.

O! who shall lightly say that fame
Is nothing but an empty name!
Whilst in that sound there is a charm
The nerves to brace, the heart to warm;
As, thinking of the mighty dead,
The young from slothful couch will start,
And vow, with lifted hands outspread,
Like them to act a noble part!—*Baillie.*

III. **Is sometimes vindicated by miraculous occurrences** (verse 21). This miracle of Elisha's, after his death, is more surprising than any of those which he performed during his lifetime. No exact parallel offers itself in the rest of Scripture. Still it may be said to belong to a class where the miracle was not wrought through the agency of a living miracle-worker, but by a material object in which, by God's will, virtue for the time being resided. The most familiar example of this class is the staunching of the issue of blood,

by the touch of the hem of Christ's garment; but the cures wrought by handkerchiefs and aprons brought to the sick from the body of St. Paul (Acts xix. 12) are still more nearly parallel. In the present instance, no doubt the primary effect was greatly to increase the reverence of the Israelites for the memory of Elisha, to lend force to his teaching, and especially to add weight to his unfulfilled prophecies, as to that concerning the coming triumphs of Israel over Syria. In the extreme state of depression to which the Israelites were now reduced, a very signal miracle may have been needed to encourage and re-assure them (*Speaker's Comm.*) It was not the dead body of Elisha, but the living God, that gave life again to the dead; and Omnipotence worked by contact with the dead Elisha to show that the Divine efficiency that was in the prophet had not disappeared from Israel with his death. The future fame and influence of the good may be safely left in the hands of God.

LESSONS:—A good man.—1. *Is the fruit of divine grace.* 2. *Is a great boon to a nation.* 3. *Is imperishable in his influence.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 20. The death of the good. I. A calamity to a distracted country. II. Suggests that the most conspicuous piety cannot evade the penalty of sin. III. The cause of wide-spread and genuine sorrow. IV. Leads men to reflect upon the influence and power of the life just terminated.

— Such was Elisha, greater yet less, less yet greater, than Elijah. He is less. For character is the real prophetic gift. The man, the will, the personal grandeur of the prophet are greater than any amount of prophetic acts, or any extent of prophetic success. We cannot dispense with the mighty past, even when we have shot far beyond it. Nations, churches, individuals must all be content to fare as dwarfs in comparison with the giants of old time—with the Reformers, the Martyrs—the heroes of their early youthful reverence. A prophet like Elijah comes once, and does not return. Elisha, both to his countrymen and to us, is but the successor—the faint reflection of his predecessor. When he appeared before the three suppliant kings, his chief honour was that he was Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who "poured water on the hands of Elijah."

Less, yet greater. For the work of the great ones of this earth is carried on by far inferior instruments, but on a far wider scale—and, it may be, in a far higher spirit. The life of an Elijah is never spent in vain. Even his death has not taken him from us. He struggles, single-handed as it would seem, and without effect; and in the very crisis of the nation's history, is suddenly and mysteriously removed. But his work continues; his mantle falls; his teaching spreads; his enemies perish. The prophet preaches and teaches; the martyr dies and passes away; but other men enter into his labours. By that one impulse of Elijah, Elisha and Elisha's successors, prophets, and sons of prophets, are raised up by fifties and by hundreds. They must work in their own way. They must not try to retain the spirit of Elijah by repeating his words, or by clothing themselves in his rough mantle, or by living his strange life.

What was begun in fire and storm, in solitude and awful visions, must be carried on through winning arts, and healing acts, and gentle words of peaceful and social intercourse. Not in the desert of Horeb, or on the top of Carmel, but in the crowded thoroughfares of Samaria, in the gardens of Damascus, and by the rushing waters of Jordan. Elisha himself may be as nothing compared with Elijah. His wonders may be forgotten. He

dies by the long decay of years; no chariots of fire are there to lighten his last moments, or bear his soul to heaven. Yet he knows that, though unseen, they are always around him. Once in the city of Dothan, in the ancient pass, where the caravans of the Midianites and the troops of the Syrians stream through into Central Palestine—when he is compassed about with chariots and horses of the hostile armies, and his servant cries out for fear, Elisha said, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." It is a vision of which the meaning acquires double force from its connection with the actual history; as if to show, by the very same figure, that the hope which bore Elijah to his triumphal end, was equally present with Elisha. Elijah, and those who are like Elijah, are needed in critical and momentous occasions to "prepare the way for the Lord." His likeness is John the Baptist: and of those that were born of women before the times of Christendom, none were greater than they. But Elisha, and those who are like Elisha, have a humbler, and yet a wider, and therefore a holier sphere; for their works are not the works of the Baptist, but are the deeds, if not of Christ Himself, at any rate of "the least in His kingdom"—the gentle, beneficent, "holy man of God, who passeth by us continually." —*Stanley*.

Before closing this account of Elisha, we must not omit to notice the parallel which Elisha presents to our Lord—the more necessary because, unlike the resemblance between Elijah and John the Baptist, no attention is called to it in the New Testament. Some features of this likeness have already been spoken of. But it is not merely because he healed a leper, raised a dead man, or increased the loaves, that Elisha resembled Christ, but rather because of that loving, gentle temper, and kindness of disposition—characteristic of him above all the saints of the Old Testament—ever ready to soothe, to heal, and to conciliate—which attracted to him women and simple people, and made him the universal friend and "father," not only consulted by kings and generals, but resorted to by widows and poor prophets in their little troubles and perplexities. We have spoken above of the fragmentary nature of the records of Elisha, and of the partial conception of his work as a prophet which they evince. Be it so. For that very reason we should the more gladly welcome those engaging traits of personal goodness which are so often to be found even in those fragments, and which give us a reflection—feeble, it is true, but still a reflection—in the midst of the sternness of the Old Dispensation, of the love and mercy of the New.—*Smith's Bible Dictionary*.

Verse 21. **The virtue of a corpse.** The chief lesson this story teaches is the mighty influence a good man may exert after his decease. 1. *We should be ambitious of this influence.* Our lives at the longest are brief. That portion of our lives devoted to holy aims is briefer still. How consolatory and inspiring is the fact that, when our brief life is finished, we can still be a power for good! Think that, from your seat in glory, you may see men inspired by the memory of your generosity, zeal, courage, purity, and prayerfulness. Their deeds in turn are remembered, and inspire others. Thus you will have a share in blessing men to the end of time. 2. *Let me remind you how much we owe to this influence.* Would you be what you are were it not for the memory of the dead? 3. *The best methods for securing this posthumous influence for good.* 1. By publishing through the press our thoughts and opinions. How many a book is like the body of Elisha—lifeless itself, yet giving life! 2. By a definite and public profession of religion. 3. By active engagement in Christian work. We must all exert some influence after death, either for weal or woe. Let us, then, be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy. —*R. A. Griffin*.

— Were not the men of Israel more dead than the carcase thus buried, how could they choose but see in this revived corpse an emblem of their own condition? How could they choose but think, if we adhere to the God of Elisha, He shall raise our decayed estates, and restore our nation to its former glory.—*Bp. Hall.*

— The miracle of Elisha's bones has been the subject both of criticism and of allegory. The rationalist, of course, admits no miracle. In his view, the deceased was only apparently dead, fallen into a trance, perhaps, but suddenly brought to his senses again by the shock of being roughly cast into Elisha's tomb; others admit a real miracle, but seem to look upon it with suspicion. "This," says Clarke, "is the first, and, I believe, the last, account of a true miracle performed by the bones of a dead man, and yet on it, and such like, the whole system of miracle-working relics has been founded by the Popish Church." "Elisha's works," says Stanley, "stand alone in the Bible in their likeness to the acts of mediæval saints. There alone, in the sacred history, the gulf between Biblical and ecclesiastical miracles almost disappears. In this, as in so much besides, his life and miracles are not Jewish, but Christian." By others the miracle is made a type of Jesus' power to raise to life by his own death and burial those who are dead in trespasses and sins. "So, too," says Wordsworth, "the apostles and evangelists, being dead, yet speak to all the world in the Gospels and Epistles, and, by the word of God in them, they raise souls to life eternal." —*Whedon.*

— Which miracle God wrought, partly to do honour to that great prophet, and that by this seal he might confirm his doctrine, and thereby confute the false doctrine and worship of the Israelites; partly to strengthen the faith of Joash and the Israelites in his promise of their success against the Syrians; and partly, in the midst of all their calamities, to comfort such Israelites as were Elisha's followers with the hopes of that eternal life whereof this was a manifest pledge, and to awaken the rest of that people to a due care and preparation for it.—*Pool.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 22-25.

THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF THE DIVINE MERCY.

I. Seen in commiserating the sufferings of His people.—"Hazael oppressed Israel; and the Lord was gracious unto them and had compassion" (verses 22 23). The Divine heart is moved with the sight of suffering and woe. It i impossible for Him to be callous and indifferent to the afflictions of His people; the more they suffer, the more they are endeared to Him. The tenderness of the Divine mercy is unspeakably exquisite. How great is our sin to treat that mercy with coldness and persistent unbelief! Suffering is often the first thing that opens our eyes to the enormity of our sin and the marvellous condescension of the Divine mercy.

II. Seen in His reluctance to inflict the extreme penalty of disobedience. —"The Lord would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His presence as yet" (verse 23). The sins of the Israelites cried for chastisement. The greatest chastisement would be to be abandoned by Jehovah to the fury of their enemies, as was ultimately done (ch. xvii. 18, 20). But, though their iniquities deserved it, this extreme punishment was delayed by the Divine mercy. That mercy was reinforced by the Divine faithfulness. The Lord remembered "His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The exercise of mercy is always in harmony with every attribute of the Divine nature. If God be slow to punish because of His mercy, His justice ensures the certainty of punishment.

III. Seen in His faithful fulfilment of the promise of deliverance (verse 25). The dying Elisha, as the mouth-piece of Jehovah, had promised Israel three victories over Syria, and the resuscitation of the corpse when it touched the bones of the buried prophet would tend to strengthen faith in the fulfilment of the promise. In this verse the fact of that fulfilment is recorded—another indication that the history was written, not to set forth the valour and prowess of the Hebrews, and the external glory of the kingdom, but to illustrate the dealings of God with them, and trace the true causes of their decline and extinction as a nation. Every page of the history bears testimony to both the mercy and faithfulness of God. Mercy rejoices in providing means of deliverance, and faithfulness in carrying them out.

LESSONS:—**The Divine mercy.**—1. *Is tender and long-suffering.* 2. *Gives no licence to wrong-doing.* 3. *Provides an opportunity for repentance and reform.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 22, 23.—National suffering. I. A chastisement for national sin. II. Awakens the Divine compassion. III. Is alleviated by the Divine mercy.

Verse 23.—When God turns Himself from us, then we are given over to wretchedness: when he turns back to us again, then we find salvation. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead for a thousand years, and yet their blessing was efficacious. God does not take pleasure in our ruin, but remembers, even in the midst of His anger, His promised grace and the covenant He has made.—*Lange.*

Verse 25.—Property wrongfully acquired. I. Has no security in its possession. II. Acquired by violence, may be restored by violence. III. Is not worth the trouble it costs to acquire and keep.

— Tyrants are rods by means of which God chastises His people; but finally the tyrants themselves are chastised by God and cast into the fire.

— These cities were unjustly obtained and quickly lost. Unrighteous wealth rarely comes to the third generation.—*Lange.*

CHAPTER XIV.

AMAZIAH IN JUDAH AND JEROBOAM II. IN ISRAEL.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. Amaziah, king of Judah—Historian returns to the records concerning *Judah*. Verse 3. Yet not like David, his father—Chronicles says, "*Not with a perfect heart,*" acting in general obedience to God's law, yet lacking in spiritual loyalty and heartfelt piety. Verse 5. Slew his servants which had slain his father—It was a Mosaic law that a son should—as both an act of justice and filial piety—avenge his father's murder; but he did this without malice, leaving their children untouched, contrary to the prevailing custom of antiquity. This act of revenge was wisely delayed till *the kingdom was confirmed in his hand*, thus indicating that these servants were men of state influence and eminence. Verse 7. Called the name of it Jokkeel—Its former name, הַסֶּלַע, *the rock*; ἡ Πέτρα, afterwards *Arabia Petræa*, situate amid steep rocks. This ancient Petra is still a scene of splendid ruins. Its new name—יָקְתְאֵל—signifies *given*, or *conquered by God*. Verse 8. Come, let us look one another in the face—An insolent challenge; perhaps inspired by desire to avenge the massacre of his ancestors by Jehu (chapter IX.), more probably from elation over his success with the Edomites. Verse 9 The thistle that was in Lebanon—A parable couched in most contemptuous form. Amaziah a mean *thistle*; *cedar of Lebanon*

being, in its grand contrast, the sovereign of Israel; the *wild beast* being the desolating army of Israel. But *thistle* should be *briar* or *briar bush*. Give thy daughter to my son to wife—Only a superior could assume such an air of authority and make such a demand. Verse 19. They made a conspiracy against him—Mal-administration of the kingdom followed upon this fatal war, and was accompanied with spiritual apostasy (2 Chron. xxv. 27); and the ruin of Jerusalem, the sack of the temple, with the captivity of the children carried away as hostages, roused Judah to conspire and overthrow him. Verse 20. They brought him on horses—עַל הַסּוּסִים, *i. e., on the royal equestrian chariot.* Verse 21. All the people of Judah took Azariah—So that the popular hostility was not against Amaziah's family, but against himself. Verse 22. He built Elath, and restored it to Judah—Elath was the Edomite seaport (see on 1 Kings ix. 26). Verse 23. In the fifteenth year, &c., Jeroboam, king of Israel, &c.—*Israel's history resumed.* This was Jeroboam II. His reign was marked by idolatry, yet also with great political success (verse 25). Verse 25. Spake by his servant Jonah—Not found in the Book of Jonah which we possess. Verse 26. There was not any shut up, &c.—*Comp.* Notes on Kings xiv. 10. Verse 27. The Lord said not that He would blot out the name of Israel—The Divine purposes had not yet announced the obliteration of the ten tribes of the house of Israel.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-22.

Military Ambition.

Amaziah was a warrior-king, and throughout his reign we hear the incessant clash of sabres and the hurried movements of the military. He dragged his country down to disaster and defeat, and was himself a victim of the vicissitudes of war. He forsook the Lord and became infatuated with idolatry; and we learn once more how certain and how terrible is the downfall of the man who abandons Jehovah (2 Chron. xxv. 14-16). His career illustrates the different phases of *military ambition.*

I. Military ambition may be associated with a defective piety (verses 1-4). He did what was right, but not with a perfect heart, like David. His standard of right was too low. His piety was not vigorous and independent enough to lift him above all human examples, or even to strive to imitate the best. He chose an inferior example to copy. "He did according to all things as Joash his father did." There was a remarkable similarity in the lives of Joash and Amaziah. Both began their reigns, professing zeal for the worship of Jehovah, and afterwards lapsed into idolatry: both ignored the warnings of faithful prophets; and both, having forsaken God, perished by the hands of the assassins. War and religion, though representing directly opposite principles, are often strangely united in the history of nations, but always to the damage of religion. The war-spirit is an enemy to genuine piety. The love of military glory weakens the religious conscience.

II. Military ambition delights in scenes of slaughter and bloodshed (verses 5-7). It is mentioned to his credit, that when Amaziah avenged his father's death by the execution of his murderers, he did not slay the children of the murderers, according to the usual custom in the East. He so far respected the law of God (verse 6). But we soon read of great slaughter in his Idumean wars, and of the wanton destruction of 10,000 prisoners, who were thrown down from a precipice and broken to pieces (2 Chron. xxv. 12). When the war-demon is once let loose, it riots in scenes of carnage and cruelty. The indulgence of military ambition begets an indifference and recklessness in the treatment of human life.

III. Military ambition generates a boastful spirit and an insatiable love of conquest (verses 8-10). Amaziah's victories in Edom turned his head. He felt equal to anything. He was ambitious to reign over Israel. He challenged the rival kingdom to battle, and the reply of Jehovah, in the form of a sarcastic parable, piqued his vanity and determined him to risk the encounter. There are some minds to whom success is more dangerous than failure.

> Good success
> Is oft more fatal far than bad, one winning throw,
> Cast from a flattering die, tempting a gamester
> To hazard his whole fortune. *Chapman.*

IV. Military ambition is often humbled by ignominious defeat (verses 11-14). It was not long before Amaziah had reason to regret his boastful challenge. By the prompt action of his rival hostilities were precipitated; Judah was utterly defeated, the king taken prisoner, the wall of Jerusalem broken, the temple stripped of its treasures, and hostages taken to prevent any further molestation. Another illustration of Prov. xvi. 18.

> Ah, curst ambition! to thy lures we owe
> All the great ills that mortals bear below. *Tickell.*

Of all kinds of ambition, military ambition is most disappointing, and subject to great fluctuations of fortune. History teems with examples of how the ambitious warrior is at length defeated with the same weapons and by the same methods with which he sought to defeat and humble others. "The stone falls back upon the head of him who casts it into the air."

V. Military ambition is detrimental to good government.—1. *It is dangerous to the ruler himself* (verses 17-20). The disastrous issue of the war with Israel created national dissatisfaction. The nobles were scandalized that their children were draughted away as hostages, and the people were grievously annoyed to see their city invaded and their loved temple pillaged by a despised rival. The disaffections grew into serious proportions. A conspiracy was formed to assassinate Amaziah, as the cause of all their trouble. The fear and anguish of that period would be the bitterest experience of his life. Of what avail now were his military powers and his bannered hosts? The interests of his own people had been sacrificed to his ambitious folly, and he at length becomes the victim of their disaffection and anger. What Hume says of Richard Cœur de Lion would apply with equal force to Amaziah: "He was better calculated to dazzle men by the splendour of his enterprise than either to promote their happiness or his own grandeur by a sound and well-regulated policy." 2. *It entails trouble to his successor* (verses 21, 22). The conquest of Edom by his father required Azariah to capture and fortify the seaport of Elath. The results of past victories can be retained only by ceaseless vigilance and effort. The conquests of the father often impose serious burdens upon the son.

LESSONS:—*The love of military glory is the bane of any nation.* 2. *The throne that is won by war is lost by war.* 3. *It is a nobler ambition to be good than to be great; to build up and consolidate rather than destroy.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1-4. Imperfect piety. I. *May be genuine up to a certain point.* "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." II. *Is lacking in thorough consecration.* "Not like David his father." III. *Is limited by the*

example it imitates. "He did according to all things as Joash his father did.

Verse 3. In cases like that of Amaziah, where faith is not completely and sincerely an affair of the heart, it has no firm foundation, and is quickly overwhelmed, either by unbelief or by superstition. A half-and-half disposition in what is good is a bridge that leads to what is evil. In sacred and spiritual affairs we have not to ask, How did our fathers do? but, How would God have us do? Because Amaziah only did as his father had done, he finally fared as his father had fared.—*Lange.*

Verses 5, 6. **A revengeful spirit.** I. *Knows how to wait for its opportunity.* II. *Carries out its purpose with terrible exactness.* III. *Is controlled by respect for the Divine law.*

— It is as much a sin to leave the guilty unpunished, as to punish the innocent. Right and justice are distorted by both courses. Where regicides are allowed to go unpunished, out of pity or weakness, there all justice ceases. The throne and the civil authority are not established by weak concessions, but by righteousness.—*Lange.*

Verse 6. "But the children of the murderers he slew not"—wherein he showed some faith and courage that he would obey this command of God, though it was very hazardous to himself, such persons being likely to seek revenge for their father's death.—*Pool.*

Verses 7-14. **The intoxication of success.** I. *Leads to indiscreet and boastful challenges* (v. 7, 8). II. *Indignantly repudiates all advice and warning* (v. 9-11). III. *Precipitates humiliating defeat and widespread disaster* (v. 12-14).

Verses 7-14. Extraordinary success in our undertakings is a great temptation to arrogance. Those must be strong legs which can support great good fortune and prosperity. God blesses our undertakings in order that we may become not haughty, but humble (Gen. xxxii. 10, 11). Every undue self-exaltation robs us of the blessing again.—*Wurt. Summ.*

Verse 8. We learn from Chronicles that Amaziah had hired a large body of Israelite soldiers for his Idumæan war, but, warned by a prophet, had dismissed them. These persons, disgusted at their treatment, ravaged the Jewish territory on their way back to Samaria (2 Chron. xxv. 13), thus affording to Amaziah a sufficient ground of quarrel. This, however, was the occasion rather than the cause of the war. The cause was Amaziah's pride and ambition. His success against Edom had so elated him that he thought himself more than a match for his northern neighbours (comp. verse 10, and 2 Chron. xxv. 19).—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 9. People in the East very often express their sentiments in a parabolic form, especially when they intend to convey unwelcome truths, or a contemptuous sneer. This was the design of the admonitory fable related by Joash in his reply. The thistle, a low shrub, might be chosen to represent Amaziah, a petty prince; the cedar, a powerful sovereign of Israel; and the wild beast that trode down the thistle, the overwhelming army with which Israel could desolate Judah. But, perhaps, without making so minute an application, the parable may be explained generally as describing in a striking manner the effects of pride and ambition, towering far beyond their natural sphere, and sure to fall with a sudden and ruinous crash. The moral of the fable is contained in verse 10.—*Jamieson.*

— The destroyer is represented as *passing by*, not as sent out by the cedar. So Jehoash might wish to suggest to Amaziah that in case he meddled with things beyond his province he would be suddenly smitten by some judgment of the Almighty. He does not proudly boast and presume to tread down Amaziah and

Judah by his own warriors and martial prowess.—*Whedon.*

Verse 10. He who desires to correct another for his arrogance must take good care not to fall into the same fault himself. Blame and complaint for the pride and arrogance of others often come from hearts which exalt themselves too much. Do not parade your wisdom and strength, if you really possess them. The Lord breaks down even the cedars of Lebanon (Ps. xxix. 5; Isa. ii. 12, 13).—*Lange.*

Verse 12. The author of Chronicles notes that Amaziah's obstinacy, and his consequent defeat and captivity, "came of God" (2 Chron. xxv. 20), were judgments upon him for an idolatry into which he had fallen after his conquest of Edom.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Oh, the depth of Divine justice and wisdom in these outward administrations! The best cause, the best man, doth not ever fare best. Amaziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, Joash evil; Amaziah follows David, though not with equal paces; Joash follows Jeroboam; yet is Amaziah shamefully foiled by Joash. Whether God yet meant to visit upon this king of Judah the still odious unthankfulness of his father Jehoiada, or to plague Judah for their share in the blood of Zechariah and their late revolt to idolatry; or whether Amaziah's too much confidence in his own strength, which moved his bold challenge to Joash, were thought fit to be thus taken down; or whatever other secret ground of God's judgment there might be, it is not for our presumption to inquire.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 18-22. The vicissitudes of a monarch's life. I. His fame is the great theme of the historian (ver. 18). II. He is the subject of dark and dangerous conspiracy (ver. 19). III. Notwithstanding the most anxious precautions, he falls a victim to the assassin (ver. 19). IV. His dead body may be more reverenced than his character (ver. 20). V. His successor reaps the benefit of his successes (ver. 21, 22).

Verse 19. His turning after the gods of Edom (2 Chron. xxv. 27), his defeat by Jehoash, the hostages taken of him, and the spoliation of the temple, all served to make the last half of his reign unpopular. The discontent of the kingdom culminated in conspiracy. So he perished like his father (chap. xii. 20).—*Whedon.*

Verse 20. They conveyed his body back to Jerusalem in the royal chariot and with the horses which had brought him to Lachish. The combination of relentless animosity against the living prince with the deepest respect for his dead remains is very characteristic of an Oriental people.—*Speaker's Comm.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 23—29.

National Prosperity—an Opportunity for National Reform.

Jeroboam reigned longer than any other king of Israel, and soon gave evidence of possessing considerable capacity and energy. He not only checked the Syrian invasion and regained the portions of his kingdom which had been seized by the foe, but carried the war into Syria and overawed Damascus into submission. Adversity having failed to bring back Israel to the true worship of Jehovah, a period of prosperity is granted, with no better result. Instead of tracing the goodness of God in their national blessings, the people are confirmed in their calf-worship, and attribute their successes to the influence of Baal. It is their last opportunity, and they see it not. Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first madden. The subsequent history of Israel is one of decline and disaster, until as a nation it becomes extinct. The long and

prosperous reign of Jeroboam II. may be regarded as *an opportunity for national reform*. Observe—

I. **That the misfortunes of a nation awaken the Divine compassion** "For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter" (ver. 26) The Divine compassion seen—1. *In promising help and instruction by a duly authorized messenger.* "According to the Word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet" (verse 26). We have no record of the prophecy uttered by Jonah on this occasion, but it doubtless had reference to the victories over the Syrians that would be granted to the arms of Jeroboam, and be accompanied with warnings and instructions to recognise the authority and power of Jehovah. The Lord pitied the ignorance and infatuation of Israel, and the misery which their own sins had brought upon them, and He once more sends His servant to call them to repentance and reformation. A faithful and earnest ministry is a boon to any people, and brings with it a solemn responsibility to all who hear. 2. *In suspending the threat of extinction.*—"And the Lord said not that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven" (ver. 27). The idolatry and corruption of Israel merited the punishment of Jehovah, but in mercy He deferred the desolating stroke to give them space for repentance. The time came when the Divine compassion ceased, and the prophets Hosea, Amos, Micah, and others foretold the ruin that fell on Israel with such terrible force. Reprieves are not pardons. The Lord waits to be gracious; but where impenitence continues, the threatened vengeance will surely fall. 3. *In providing a competent deliverer.*—"He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam" (ver. 27). Jeroboam was "a man of might" (ver. 28), distinguished by personal prowess and military genius, and by those qualities that make the successful statesman and ruler. Though himself an idolater, he is used as an instrument to deliver Israel and raise the nation to an extraordinary height of prosperity. The Lord has His agents planted in unseen and unexpected quarters. They may seem the most unlikely to carry out His purposes, and may themselves be unconscious of the real drift of the work they are permitted and aided to accomplish.

II. **That national prosperity is a token of the Divine beneficence.** "He restored the coast, recovered Damascus" (comp. ver. 25, 28). The dash and enterprise of Jeroboam roused the nation into new life. The success of his arms at the boundaries of his kingdom ensured protection and peace; and the wheels of commerce, once more set in motion, carried prosperity into every part of the land. Confucius has thus portrayed the signs of national prosperity—

> Where spades grow bright, and idle words grow dull;
> Where jails are empty, and where barns are full;
> Where Church paths are with frequent feet outworn;
> Law court-yards weedy, silent, and forlorn;
> Where doctors foot it, and where farmers ride;
> Where age abounds and youth is multiplied—
> Where those signs are, they clearly indicate
> A happy people and well-governed State.

Prosperity, like every other blessing, is from God; it is often the severest test applied to the conduct of individuals and of nations. The glitter and glut of prosperity may hide the hand that gives. The heart that adversity could not vitiate has been seduced by the subtle smiles of inconstant prosperity.

III. **That national prosperity is abused when it does not lead to national reform.** "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; he departed

not from all the sins of Jeroboam (ver. 24). As was the king, so were the people The sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, like a close-fitting Nessus garment. still clung to his idolatrous descendants. The goodness of God, that was intended to lead them to repentance, was misinterpreted as sanctioning and even rewarding their apostacy, and instead of weaning them from their idols, lulled them into a false confidence in the supremacy of Baal. It is sad to see blessings abused, opportunities neglected, warnings disregarded, and a whole nation sinking into the gulf of ruin. How unspeakable is the compassion of Him who observes the follies and sins of mankind, and yet shows Himself more eager to restore than destroy!

LESSONS:—1. *That prosperity and adversity are tests of fidelity to principle.* 2. *An opportunity for reformation comes to every individual and every nation.* 3. *The abuse of opportunity intensifies the inveteracy of evil.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 25-27. I. *Israel's deep misery* (Jer. ii. 19). II. *God's great pity* (Ps. ciii. 10; Hos. ix. 8).—*Lange.*

— Our faithful God helps us out of trouble, according to His great compassion, even when we have not deserved it of Him; but often not until our distress has reached the highest pitch, and no help is to be expected from any other quarter.

Verse 25. Jonah must have been prominent among his order in these stormy times, for we find him the counsellor of Jeroboam in a policy of vigour against Syria. Enthusiastically patriotic, the depression of Israel weighed on his heart. But he did not despair of his country even in its darkest hour. It was under the protection of Jehovah, and must rise again, if it repented and returned to its invisible King. With keen insight into the capacity of the new ruler in Samaria, he recognised him as the deliverer promised by God to save His chosen people, and animated him to take the field against the long-dreaded enemy, by the inspired assurance that he would be victorious, and would even extend the narrow limits of Israel well-nigh to the grandeur of David's empire—from Hamath, in the northern valley of Lebanon, on the Orontes, to the south of the Dead Sea. That Jonah should have been sent on an errand of mercy to a great heathen city (Nineveh) is specially interesting, as the first prominent expression of the Divine love to all mankind found in the Old Testament. The very harshness and exclusive narrowness of the prophet himself heightens the charm of the narrative. God has pity on the great city, although idolatrous; but Jonah is unwilling to carry a message of love outside his own nation. His very conceptions of the Almighty show the imperfect ideas of his time. He thinks to escape from Him by leaving Palestine for a region beyond the sea. And even when forced on his journey, his Jewish bigotry shows itself in his anger that a heathen population should have averted its threatened doom by a timely repentance.—*Geikie's Hours with the Bible.*

Verses 26, 27. God's unfailing interest in His people.—I. *He is minutely acquainted with their abject affliction.* II. *He delays the execution of the judgment their sins deserve.* III. *He mercifully delivers them from their distress.*

Verse 27. The reign of this king, which was distinguished by so extraordinary a flow of prosperity, increased the religious apostacy, and by consequence the moral degeneracy, of Israel. Under him the corruption of manners became extreme, and laid the foundation for those public calamities which befel the kingdom soon after his demise, and quickly accomplished the destruction of the nation. *Hengstenberg* observes: "The prosperity only

confirmed the people still more in their temerity. Instead of being led to repentance by the unmerited mercy of God, they considered this prosperity as a reward of their apostacy, as a seal by which Jehovah-Baal confirmed the rectitude of their ways. The false prophets, too, did what was in their power to strengthen them in their delusion, whilst the true prophets preached to deaf ears." Hengstenberg refers in this last sentence to the emphatic warnings addressed to Jeroboam by Hosea and Amos. Although his whole reign was marked by signal successes, notwithstanding that apostacy, which was usually punished by war and loss of national independence, the wrath of God was denounced against Israel, as well as the destruction of the house of Jeroboam, by the two named prophets, whose writings sufficiently attest the faithful execution of their mission.—*Jamieson.*

Verses 28, 29. Jeroboam had striven for the external prosperity of his people, and when he died, he left the kingdom in a more flourishing condition than any previous king of Israel. For its spiritual welfare, however, he had done nothing. Calf-worship and other service of false gods had continued, and a moral rottenness had found entrance, which brought the kingdom near to ruin. So has many a one at his death left to his children treasures which he has won by long labour and care, but those children have not been bred in the fear and love of God, and have not been taught that "the world passeth away," &c. (1 John ii. 17; 1 Peter i. 24).—*Lange.*

CHAPTER XV.

AZARIAH AND JOTHAM IN JUDAH, AND THE LAST SIX KINGS IN ISRAEL.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1.—**Azariah, son of Amaziah, king of Judah**—This king is the *Uzziah* of 2 Chron. xxvi. See there the more extended explanation of his leprosy. His act was the assumption of sacerdotal functions, which the Lord had restricted to the Levitical priesthood. He arrogated the office of Sovereign Pontiff, and God rebuked his arrogance and impiety. *His heart was lifted up to his destruction* (2 Chron. xxvi. 16). Verse 5. **Leper unto the day of his death**—In his pride he aspired to be more than king, usurped the functions of God s consecrated priests; would have seized "the holy crown" of the high priesthood, and added that to his own royal crown. Therefore God took away what was rightly his, and might have enjoyed till his death, debased him to a leper, and thus he died. So covetousness beggars, not ennobles men, and profanity ensures overthrow and contempt. **Dwelt in a several house**—An array of authorities regard בֵּית הַחָפְשִׁית as meaning *house of sickness, a hospital*, from חָפַשׁ, which (without any Scriptural analogy in the use of the word) they render to be *prostrate, weak*, or *sick*. The natural meaning of the verb is *to be loosed, set free*, as (in Pual form) Lev. xix. 20, the release of a slave. *A separate house*, therefore, is the best rendering, and fulfils the law of Levit. xiii. 46, that lepers should dwell apart, outside the camp or city. He was thus an outcast Even *in burial* (verse 7) he was only interred in the "*field* of the burial" of the kings (2 Chron. xxvi. 23), not in the royal vaults, as being a leper. As the record stands, it marks God's displeasure against presumption, for "the *Lord smote the king*;" and this Divine judgment denotes guilt. Even though his rushing to the altar might have been through "too much zeal rather than too little," as is suggested, zeal must not violate law. To go beyond God's direction is guilty as to fall behind. To "add to" what is written is denounced equally as to "take from" (Rev. xxii. 18, 19). Verse 10. **Assassination of Zachariah by the conspirator Shallum**—The compound word rendered "*before the people*," would seem to record a public act of regicide to which the populace offered no resistance. But Dr. H. Gratz reads it as "*in Ibleam*" (*i. e.*, a town in the plains of Jezreel). Yet קֳבֵל־עַם naturally mean what the text records,

although Gratz notes that the A. V. is ungrammatical. The *Sept.* translate thus:—καὶ ἐπάταξεν αὐτὸν ἐν Κεβλαὰμ. Verse 12. This was the word of the Lord unto Jehu; so it came to pass—See chap. x. 30. Thus Jehu's dynasty perished ignominiously, and the verity of God's pledge was vindicated equally with the severity of God's judgments. Verse 19. King of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave talents . . that he might confirm the kingdom in his hand—This was the *first effort* by a king of Israel to ensure his own throne by purchase of *protection from a foreign power*. Hosea denounced it (Hosea v. 13; vii. 11; x. 6). It opened the pathway which led onwards to Israel's doom. Protection from a mighty nation issues in oppression by them. And verse 19 leads forward inevitably to verse 29, "the king of Assyria *carried them captive to Assyria*." Verse 29. Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria—He was the successor of Pul (verse 19). Smith's translation of the cuneiform inscriptions gives the name as *Taklat-pel-ashir*, which may mean "Lord of the Tigris;" but this is uncertain. His annals and the records of his expedition into Syria have been found at Nimroud, but his genealogy is not given; and as this is the only instance of silence concerning a king's pedigree it is supposed he was a usurper. Verse 37. The Lord began to send against Judah, &c.—This was the beginning of a confederacy by the *Israelites* with the Syrians *against Judah*, an alliance which shows, for the first time in the history of the divided kingdoms, that hostility had grown so intense between Israel and Judah that a foreign force was called in to make violent attack upon Judah's borders. So, when such fellowship and affection as are hallowed and Divinely sanctioned are violated, evil confederacies are sure to be sought, and antagonism grows rife where unity and love should have ruled.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-7 *and* 32-38.

The Biblical Estimate of National Affairs.

The reigns of Azariah and Jotham, here referred to with such marked brevity, covered a most eventful period in the history of Judah and Israel, extending over nearly seventy years. The prophets Hosea, Amos, Joel, Jonah, and the sublime Isaiah, flourished during the period, and uttered their faithful protest against the national apostacy. Under the vigorous administration of Azariah and Jotham the kingdom of Judah was placed in a condition of great strength and prosperity. The success of Azariah in all departments seemed to correspond to his double name: Azariah, the *strength* of Jehovah, and Uzziah, the *help* of Jehovah. But prosperity, as in other periods and nations, was not without its baleful effects. With the increase of wealth, the nobles of Judah rose into importance, and their luxury, indolence, drunkenness, and oppressive exactions, were in a high degree scandalous: "They skinned the poor to the very quick, they picked their bones and ground them to powder." The haughty ladies of Zion, decked in gayest apparel and covered with tinkling ornaments, forgot the modesty of their sex as they mincingly tripped along the streets. The licentiousness and irreligion of the times were interrupted and perhaps punished by two great calamities—the awful, dearthful visitation of locusts, who found a garden of Eden, and left it an empty, desolate wilderness; and the ever-memorable earthquake which shook the solid building of the Temple, and moved through the land like a mighty wave of the sea (*vide* Joel ii. 1-20; Amos iv. 6-9; Amos i. 1, 2; Zech. xiv. 5). The paragraph before us is a suggestive illustration of the *Biblical estimate of national affairs.*

I. It views the nation in its relation to the claims of Jehovah. 1. *Commands obedience to the Divine purpose* (ver. iii. 34). So far as Azariah and Jotham imitated the theocratic kings, they had the approbation of all lovers of Zion. The highest exercise of kingly power is to use it in furthering the ends of Divine government. 2. *Is careful to record the monarch's interest in the House of God* (ver. 33 and 35). The history emphasises the fact that the name of Jotham's mother was "Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok," who was probably a priest, and would thus show the close association of the king with the

religious order. Special reference is also made to his building "the higher gate of the House of the Lord." He thu sought to induce the worshippers to bring their offerings to the temple of the true Jehovah, and forsake the forbidden "high places" where many were accustomed to sacrifice. The king does himself honour in all he does for the house of God. 3. *Exposes the defects of religious duty* (ver. 4 and 35). Both Azariah and Jotham were favourable to the worship of Jehovah, but they showed no great zeal in it. Their government was not remarkable for any decided religious reform, or the quickening of new religious life. The false worship was allowed to exist side by side with the true. The word of God notices this, and while it commends what is good, it faithfully denounces the evil.

II. **It takes note of any signal instance of Divine judgment.** "And the Lord smote the king, so that he was a leper" (ver. 5). The writer of Kings is silent as to the circumstances under which the king was thus afflicted. He simply records the fact, and regards it as a judgment of Jehovah. (For particulars read 2 Chron. xxvi. 16-21). The Bible abounds in examples of Divine judgments on nations and individuals (*e.g.*, Sodom and Gomorrha, Gen. xix.; Egyptians, Ex. ix.; Amalek, 1 Sam. xv.; Cain, Gen. iv.; Saul, 1 Sam. xxviii.; Jezebel, 2 Kings ix.; Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v). These examples might be multiplied indefinitely. "Every story," says Feltham, "is a chronicle of this truth, and the whole world but the practice. We live not long enough to observe how the judgments of God walk their rounds in striking. Neither always are we able. Some of God's corrections are in the night, and closeted. Every offence meets not with a market lash."

> Accuse not heaven's delay; if loth to strike,
> Its judgments, like the thunder-gathered storm,
> Are but the greater. *Webster.*

III. **It dismisses with briefest notice the public acts of a great and victorious monarch** (ver. 6). The successful wars of the king, his elaborate defences, his public buildings, his encouragement of agriculture and commerce—all these are passed over with the brief formula—"the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did." The sacred writer was more concerned to show how the king served God and exalted His worship than how he aggrandized himself and his people. External prosperity is delusive and evanescent: growth in piety is a permanent blessing to the nation.

IV. **It reveals the combination of powers by which Jehovah would punish the nation for its sins** (ver. 37). When the Arctic voyager penetrates the northern seas, the first indication of his approach to the great ice region is a white streak of light seen in the stratum of air nearest the horizon called "the ice-blink." He then observes loose pieces of ice floating on both sides of his vessel—the modest vanguard of the terrible army of ice-giants with which the stout-timbered ship has to do battle, and by which it is ultimately crushed and vanquished. So this alliance of Rezin and Pekah was the beginning of a series of attacks on Judah which ended in its utter overthrow. Thus Jehovah punished the nation for its idolatry. It is a mercy when the first signs of coming calamity are noted, and its severities avoided by timely repentance and reform. Jehovah can disconcert and scatter the most potent combinations of men, or use them as his instruments for avenging wrong.

LESSONS:—1. *The sacred writers are more careful to depict the moral condition than the external magnificence of the nation.* 2. *We learn that the great object of revelation is to give prominence, not to merely historical details, but to the development of the Divine purpose in redeeming the race.* 3. *The fidelity and impartiality of the sacred writings should command our reverence and belief.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-7, and 32-38. At this time the people turned their attention to money-getting not so much, as had formerly been the case, in particular provinces and districts, but throughout the country, even in Judah; and not so much because a single king like Solomon favoured commercial undertakings, as because the love of trade and gain, and the desire for the easy enjoyment of the greatest possible amount of wealth, had taken possession of all classes. All the scorn poured out by the prophets upon this haste to be rich, and all the rebuke of their tendency to cheat, which was one of the fruits of it, no longer availed to restore the ancient simplicity and contentment (Hosea xii. 8; Isa. ii. 7). The long and fortunate reign of Uzziah in Judah was very favourable to the growth of this love of gain and enjoyment. Many were the complaints in Judah of the injustice of the judges and of the oppression of the helpless (Amos iii. 1; vi. 1; Hosea v. 10). There was a perverse and mocking disposition prevalent which led men to throw doubt upon everything, and to raise objections to everything (Amos vi. 3; ix. 10; Hosea iv. 4). It made them treat with harsh contempt the rebukes and exhortations of the best prophets, as we feel distinctly from the tone of the writings of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. It led them to desire to know heathen religions and to introduce foreign divinities, even when the king himself held aloof from any such movement (Amos ii. 4; Hosea iv. 15; vi. 11; xii. 1; Isa. ii. 8).—*Ewald.*

Verse 3. Azariah not only maintained the worship of Jehovah, but was a good and religious monarch during the greater portions of his reign. See 2 Chron. xxvi. 4, 5. Becoming puffed up, however, with his military successes, he attempted to invade the high priest's office, and forfeited God's favour for this sin.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Ver. 5. The Judgment of God.—I. Is never inflicted but on the gross violation of His law (comp. 2 Chron. xxvi. 16-21). II. Knows no distinction of person or rank—"The Lord smote the king." III. Involves terrible suffering—"He was a leper unto the day of his death." IV. Isolates the sufferer from all he loved and prized—"He dwelt in a several house."

— The only incident which is mentioned during the long reign of Uzziah is that God touched him, and that he was a leper until his death. It follows that this fact must have seemed to the author to be important before all others. Leprosy is not for him an accidental disease, but a Divine judgment for guilt, as it is often described (Num. xii. 10; Deut. xxiv. 8, 9; 2 Sam. iii. 29; 2 Kings v. 27). He does not tell more particularly what the sin of the king was; perhaps it was hateful to the king alone, and personally, and not to the whole people, like the sin of Jeroboam.—*Lange.*

— We should not be over bold to undertake duties which do not devolve upon us. He who covets more than he has any right to have, loses even what he has. We cannot break over the bounds which God has set, without incurring punishment. Think no man blessed until thou hast seen his end.—*Ibid.*

Verse 6. These acts were recorded by Isaiah, and have come down to us in Chronicles. They comprised, besides the re-establishment of Elath—1. Successful wars (*a*) with the Philistines, which resulted in the capture and dismantling of Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod, and in the planting of a number of Jewish colonies in the Philistine country; (*b*) with the Arabians of Gur-baal; and (*c*) with the Mehunim or Maonites. 2. Extension of the power of Judah over Ammon. 3. Fortification of Jerusalem. 4. Extension of pasture and of agriculture towards the East and South, and protection of the agricultural and pastoral

population by means of towers. 5. Reorganisation of the army. And 6. Construction of numerous engines for the attack and defence of towns (see 2 Chron. xxvi. 6-15). Compare for the flourishing condition of Judea at this time, Isaiah ii. 7-16.—*Speaker's Comm.*

Verse 7 compared with Isa. vi. 1-3. **Isaiah's vision of the majesty and glory of Jehovah.**—Special work needs special training. This is a principle recognized in all God's dealings. He prepares His servants for special work by a special course of training and discipline, and by special and striking displays of His glory. As Moses was prepared for his work by his Egyptian experience and by splendid revelations of Jehovah; as the disciples were prepared for their mission by the teachings of Christ and the extraordinary endowments of the Spirit, so Isaiah was qualified for his work by the teachings of this glorious vision. His commission as a prophet was renewed, his faith confirmed, his religious fervour intensified, and his soul braced up for the important duties before him. I. *This vision was a revelation of the universal government of Jehovah.* "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne." The throne of God is the centre and source of universal government, including in its conception the two leading ideas of dominion and power. 1. *Dominion.* This extends over the whole universe of existing things—great and small—reaching and acting upon the most distant with the same ease and comprehensiveness as is shown in the management of those nearest the central throne. 2. *Power.* It is by the exercise of this attribute that Jehovah makes His dominion felt, and accomplishes His gracious and righteous purposes. That power is infinite and absolute, but its exercise is ever limited by His will, and controlled and regulated by His wisdom: it is constantly operating for our good, both in the material and spiritual realms. II. *This vision was a revelation of the adorable holiness of Jehovah.* "And one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." The holiness of God is the beauty and glory of all other perfections. If it were possible for one attribute to have any excellency over another, that pre-eminency must be given to His holiness. Power is the hand or arm of God, Omniscience His eye, Mercy His heart, Eternity His duration, but holiness is His beauty. He is called "the Holy One," the "Holy One of Israel," and is said to be "glorious in holiness." This glimpse of the surpassing holiness of Jehovah overwhelmed the prophet. He was smitten with the sense of his own vileness, and cried, "Woe is me, because I am a man of unclean lips!" It was a picture of conscious sin, cowed and shrinking before the presence of infinite purity. 'Tis ever so. Nothing humbles us more than the contrast of our own insignificence and sin with the majesty and ineffable perfections of God. III. *This vision was a revelation of the higher order of beings engaged in the service and worship of Jehovah.* 1. Observe their exalted station. "Above, or around the throne stood the seraphim." This indicates their superiority over the heavenly hosts. Jehovah has legions of angels, varying in ability and rank; highest in the innumerable grades stand the seraphim. 2. Observe their extraordinary endowments. "Each one had six rings; with twain he covered his face"—a token of deep reverence and adoring awe, as though unable to bear the insufferable blaze of the Divine glory, or to fathom the incomprehensible mysteries of the Divine nature. "With twain he covered his feet"—a token of profound respect and humility, as if he would fain hide the humblest instrumentalities by which he might accomplish the Divine purposes. "With twain he did fly"—an emblem of the willingness and speed with which he would execute the Divine commands. 3. Observe their delightful employment. "One cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His

glory." They chant in responsive strains the praises of Jehovah. What a lofty example of worship and service have we here! Burning with holy and unquenchable love, we may well strive to emulate the adoration of the glowing seraphim.

The church of to-day has special work to do, and to do it successfully needs special help and instruction. The age in which we live demands the exercise of every kind of power the church can legitimately wield. To meet the multiform aspects of the active thought of our time, to sympathise with all that is true, and denounce wisely and boldly all that is false and misleading; to soothe the world's deep sorrow and lessen its distracting woes; to conduct the troubled heart of humanity to the satisfying rest for which it daily groans—this is a work demanding superhuman aid. We never feel so weak as when we come to grapple with the difficulties of earnest Christian work. It is then we touch the furthermost point of human limitation, and, conscious of our powerlessness, we cry out, like one of old—"I beseech thee, show me thy glory." And as the vision dawns and pours its splendours on our stricken spirits, we feel the throb of a new ecstatic life, and, with the glow of an intenser love, and sustained by an invincible resolution, we press on to grander achievements!

— We have been hearing of a vision. Does that word sound as if it belonged to times which we have left far behind, as if it pointed to something fantastical and incredible? Oh! if there were no such visions, what an utterly dark and weary and unintelligible place this world would be! How completely we should be given up to the emptiest phantoms, to the base worship of phantoms! What mere shows and mockeries would the state and ceremonial of kings, the debates of legislators, the yearnings and struggles of people become! How truly would the earth be what it seemed to the worn-out misanthropical libertine—"A stage, and all the men and women merely players." A thousand times we have been all tempted to think it so. The same painted scenery, the same shifting pageants, the same unreal words spoken through different masks by counterfeit voices, the same plots which seem never to be unravelled, what does it all mean? How do men endure the ceaseless change, the dull monotony? Satirists and keen observers of the world's follies have asked this question again and again. The best man may often doubt what he should reply. But he hears a voice saying to him, "Try to be true to thyself; resist the powers which are tempting thee to go through thy acts, common or sacred, as if thou wert a mere machine; hold fast thy faith that God is, and is working when thou seest least of His working, and when the world seems most to be going on without Him; assure thyself that there is an order in the universe when all its movements seem most disorderly. So will the things around thee by degrees acquire a meaning and a purpose. And when Divine love has kindled thy flagging and perishing thoughts and hopes, thou mayest learn that God can use thee to bearing the tidings of His love and righteousness to a sense-bound land that is bowing to silver and gold, to horses and chariots. And if there should come a convulsion in that land, such as neither thou nor thy fathers have known, be sure that it signifies the removal of such things as can be shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."—*Maurice.*

Verse 34. Josephus gives Jotham a very high character, that he was pious towards God, just towards men, and laid himself out for the public good; that whatever was amiss he took care to have it rectified; and, in short, wanted no virtue that became a good prince.

Verse 35. "He built the higher gate of the house of the Lord." The love of Divine worship.—I. Shown in reverence for God's house. II. In cheerful sacrifice and labour for the improvement of that house. III. In

making the house and worship of God attractive to others.

— It is a glorious thing for a prince, instead of beautifying his palaces and building ivory houses (Amos iii. 15), to restore the temple gates, and so say to his people, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise."

Verse 37. It appears by this that the alliance between Pekah and Rezin was made in the reign of Jotham. It had for its object in all probability the consolidation of a power in Syria which might be strong enough to resist the further progress of the Assyrian arms. The recent invasions of Pul and Ziglath-Pileser had effectually alarmed the two northern monarchs, and had induced them to put aside the traditional jealousies which naturally kept them apart, and to make a league offensive and defensive. Into this league they were anxious that Judea should enter; but they distrusted the house of David, which had been so long hostile both to Damascus and to Samaria. They consequently formed the design of transferring the Jewish crown to a certain Ben-Tabeal (Isa. vii. 6), probably a Jewish noble, perhaps a refugee at one of their courts, whom they could trust to join heartily in their schemes. Hostilities apparently broke out before the death of Jotham; but nothing of importance was effected until the first year of his successor —*Speaker's Comm.*

— National troubles—I. Cast their shadows before as a warning to prepare. II. Are sent to rectify the abuse of prosperity. III. Are aggravated by the active opposition of envious neighbours.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 8-31

The Unmistakable Signs of National Decay and Ruin.

I. Seen in rapid and violent dynastic changes.—During the tranquil and prosperous reigns of Uzziah and Jotham in Judah, the kingdom of Israel was plunged into anarchy and civil war, as in the days of Omri; and no less than six different monarchs occupied the throne, one of them retaining the throne only for a single month. Of the five kings after Jeroboam, only one died upon his bed. As Kitto puts it, the history sounds much like this—B murdered A and reigned in his stead; C murdered B and reigned in his stead; D murdered C and reigned in his stead; E murdered D and reigned in his stead.

> Ay, sir, our ancient crown, in these wild times
> Oft stood upon a cast—the gamester's ducat,
> So often staked and lost, and then regained,
> Scarce knew so many hazards. *The Spanish Father.*

No nation can be permanent where the governing power is unstable, commerce is paralysed, life imperilled, and the national spirit broken.

II. Seen in the prevalence of tyranny and bloodshed (verse 16-20).—Menahem waded to the throne through a stream of blood. One district refusing to recognize him, he compelled submission by the perpetration of the most horrible cruelties. To buy off an attack from the Assyrians, he exacted heavy sums of money from his people. When a nation is drained of its life-blood by civil discord, and of its wealth by a foreign power, its final doom is not very distant.

III. Seen in the powerlessness of the nation to repel invasion (verse 19, 29). It is at this point of the history we first come in sight of the great Assyrian power that is to play so important a part in the future destiny of the

Jewish nation—a presage of the catastrophe which was finished fifty years later. Menahem, though a bold warrior, knew it was madness to cope with a power so formidable, and bribed the Assyrian to withdraw by offering tribute. But in the days of Pekah the Assyrian was not so easily pacified. He ravaged the kingdom east of the Jordan, and swept away the tribes of that region into captivity; and, such was the enfeebled condition of the nation, it does not appear that Pekah made the least resistance. The steps of the process now going on with Israel have often been repeated in history. The first danger is averted by a bribe, which only serves as a temptation to new aggression. Each new attack leaves the doomed state weaker and weaker, till it is reduced to tribute; and at last a despairing effort to shake off the yoke brings down destruction. It is a noble sight to see a brave nation struggling for life and independence against a superior force; but Israel had become so demoralised that the spirit of resistance was crushed, and, for the most part, they submitted to their fate with supine indifference.

LESSONS:—1. *The nations that abandon God will be abandoned by Him.* 2. *The ruler who uses his power for his own aggrandisement and pleasure lives in constant peril, and perishes without any to mourn his loss.* 3. *The sins and follies of one nation are punished by another.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 8-31. The five kings who followed Zechariah persevered in the sins of Jeroboam, which was, from the very commencement of the kingdom, the germ of its ruin. It is to them that the prophet's words apply —"They have set up kings, but not by me; they have made princes, and I knew it not" (Hosea viii. 4). Only one of them died a natural death and left the succession to his son, who, in his turn, could only retain the sceptre for a short time. Of the others, each one killed his predecessor in order to gain the throne, the authority of which was, in the meantime, shattered by these commotions. One of the most important factors in the history of this period is the conflict with the rising Assyrian monarchy, which came to assist the internal dissension in hurrying the nation to its downfall. Assyria was destined, in the purpose of God, to be the instrument for inflicting the long-threatened judgment. —*Witsius.*

— Rulers who seized power by force and violence have never been the deliverers and protectors of their people, but rather tyrants who led it to its ruin. "In one demagogue," says Luther, "there are hidden ten tyrants." As is the master, so is the servant; as is the head, so are the members. A succession of rulers, who attained the throne by conspiracy, revolt, perjury, and murder, is the surest sign, not only that there is something rotten in the state, but also that there is nothing sound in the nation. The corruption in Israel extended, in the first place, from the head downwards. Jeroboam made Israel to sin. Then it came from below upwards. The rebels and murderers who came to the throne, came from the people. These kings were so hostile that the one killed the other; but they were of one accord in abandoning Jehovah and persevering in the sin of Jeroboam. This was the cause of their ruin. When there is no fear of God in the heart, then the door is open to every sin and vice.

Verse 10. The public assassination of a monarch—I. Readily accomplished if he is unpopular. II. Reveals the demoralization of the times. III. Increases rather than diminishes the public calamities. IV. Exposes the assassin to a similar fate (verse 14).

— "Smote him before the people"

openly and impudently—which he presumed to do, either because he remembered that the prophecy of the kingdom made to Jehu was confined to the fourth generation (chap. x. 30), which he observed to be now expired, or because he perceived that the people were generally disaffected to their king and favourable to his attempt.—*Pool.*

Verse 12. **The inflexible fidelity of the Divine Word**—I. Is based on the unchangeableness of the Divine nature. II. Is frequently illustrated by facts of history. III. Is a source of strength to the obedient, and of wholesome fear to the wicked.

— God keepeth promise with His foes: shall He fail with His friends?—*Trapp.*

This was an actual confirmation of the declaration in the fundamental law of Israel, that God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations (Exod. xx. 5; xxiv. 7; Deut. v. 9)—that is, the sin against the first and chief commandment: "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." This commandment was the foundation of the covenant with Israel, and the centre of the Israelitish nationality. The meaning is, that the sin of Jeroboam will not be permitted by God to run on beyond the third or fourth generation. No dynasty in Israel which followed the sin of Jeroboam lasted for more than three or four generations. The house of Jeroboam, like that of Baasha and Menahem, perished with its first members; the house of Omri with its third; and the house of Jehu with its fourth. Zimri, Shallum, Pehah, and Hosea died without successors; while the house of David remained without long interruption upon the throne. Although single kings in the line were guilty of apostacy, yet the sin was never continued until the second generation.—*Lange.*

Verse 16. **The barbarities of revenge.** I. Indicate a debased and brutal nature. II. May terrify into submission, but cannot command genuine obedience. III. An unstable foundation on which to build a throne (ver. 17). IV. Reveal the coward when confronted with a superior power (verse 19).

Verse 19. **The instrument of Divine retribution.** I. A time for solemn reflection when its shadow first crosses our path. II. It is vain to think it can be bribed with money. III. Soon demonstrates the pitilessness of its power (verse 29).

— The tie that had bound Samaria to Assyria from the reign of Jehu to that of Jeroboam II. had ceased to exist during a period of Assyrian depression. Menahem now renewed it, undertaking the duties of a tributory, and expecting the support and assistance which the great paramount state of Asia was accustomed to lend to her dependencies in their struggles with their neighbours. Hence the reproaches of Hosea, who sees in the submission of Ephraim an unfaithful reliance on an arm of flesh, which was at once foolish and wicked (Hosea v. 13; vii. 11; viii. 9).—*Speaker's Comm.*

— Now for the first time appeared on the Eastern horizon that great power which for a hundred years was the scourge of Asia. The ancient empire of Assyria, possibly repressed for the time by the dominion of Solomon, rose on its fall, and was henceforth intermingled with all the good and evil fortunes of the kingdom of Israel. Already in the reign of Jehu her influence began to be felt. His name is to be read on the black obelisk which records the tributes offered to Shalmaneser I. in the form of gold and silver and articles manufactured in gold. The destruction of Damascus by Jeroboam II. brought the two powers of Israel and Assyria into close contact; there was now no intervening kingdom to act as a breakwater. Long before its actual irruption the rise of the new power is noted by the prophets. Jonah had already traversed the desert and seen that great Nineveh. Amos had already, though without naming

it, foretold that a people should arise which should crush the powerful empire of Jeroboam from end to end, and sees the nations one by one swept into captivity. Hosea brings out the danger more definitely, sometimes naming it, sometimes speaking of it only under the form of the contentious king. The wakeful ear of Isaiah catches the sound of the irresistible advance of the Assyrian armies; their savage warfare, their strange language, the speed of their march, their indefatigable energy, their arrows sharp, their bows bent, their horses' hoofs like flint, and their chariots like a whirlwind.—*Stanley.*

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REIGN OF AHAZ IN JUDAH.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—**Verse 2. Twenty years old was Ahab when, &c.**—The *Sept.* MS. of the Vatican, and other MSS., give "*twenty-five*" in the corresponding account of 2 Chron. xxviii. 1. Adopting this alteration, he died at the age of forty-one, having reigned sixteen years. He could only have reached the age o fifteen when his son Hezekiah was born, for the son was twenty-five at his father's death (chap. xviii. 2). Yet a youth of fifteen is not unduly young for such a relationship in the East. Verse 3. **Made his son to pass through the fire**—This is the first record of *human sacrifice* among the Israelites. The force of evidence is against the lighter interpretation of the king's act, viz., that this was a mere fire-baptism, an act of lustration and purification—passing his son *through* the heat or flames. The phrase "go *through* the fire" is shown in Numb. xxxi. 23 to mean a testing *in the* fire, as metal, &c. (verse 22), so that what could be *consumed* by the fire was consumed; and 2 Chron. xxviii. 3 records that Ahab "burnt his children in the fire." It was the immolation of his children to Moloch, in the Valley of Hinnom. *Comp.* chap. xvii. 31; Jer. xix. 5. *Josephus* declares it to have been a holocaust: καὶ ἴδιον ὁλοκαύτωσε παῖδα. There remains, however, the probability that the children were "slain" before being committed to the fires of Moloch (*cf.* Ezek. xvi. 20, and Psa. cvi. 37). Verse 7. **Ahab sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser**—*Israel* had asked Assyrian help (chap. xvi. 9); now *Judah* throws herself upon the protection of a heathen power. Already Jehovah had become discarded in the nation's worship; how could any trust in his guardianship continue? Yet he sinned against most emphatic expostulations from Isaiah, and assurances sealed by supernatural signs (Isa. vii. 14; viii. 4). Verse 9. **King of Assyria took Damascus, and carried the people captive to Kir**—The aid Ahaz sought was purchased with the treasures of the palace and the Temple (verse 8). Tiglath vanquished the confederate kings—Rezin of Syria, and Pekah of Israel—and seized Damascus. This occurred B.C. 732. A year later he held a court of his vassals there, and twenty-three abject kings there did him obeisance, among them being mentioned Pekah, king of Israel, and Ahaz, king of Judah. "Kir" is thought to have been Karine, now Karend, in Media. Verse 10. **Ahaz saw an altar that was at Damascus**—Charmed with its elegance and novelty, he transmitted a sketch of it to Urijah the priest at Jerusalem, and ordered that one be made forthwith to supplant the altar of Jehovah in the Temple. Yet that old altar was designed under express direction and authority of the Lord God! It is called "the *great* altar" (verse 15), doubtless more because of its gorgeous splendour. The priest of Jehovah raised no remonstrance, so perfidious had become the sacerdotal spirit (verse 16). Verse 15. **The brazen altar shall be for me to enquire by**—Jehovah's sacrifices were transferred to a heathenish altar. There were as yet no idolatrous offerings sacrificed in the Temple; no discontinuance of outward worship to the God of Israel. But the Divine altar was removed from its position in the Sanctuary, and left neglected; its destination was not yet clear to Ahaz, he would consider about it. For the words, "*for me to enquire by*," is the simple significance of the phrase יִהְיֶה־לִּי לְבַקֵּר׃ Verse 17. **Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, &c.**—Spoiling the adornments to gratify his capricious fancies in, probably, decorating his own palace. Thus men debase what is sacred to suit their own purposes, but God watches the sacrilege, and He will requite the dishonour done to Him. Verse 18. **The covert for the Sabbath**—A portico used by the priests. Dr. Abraham Geiger renders these words "*molten images of the Shame*" (*i. e.*, Baal), following 2 Chron. xxviii. 2; but מֵיסַךְ was, says Keil, "unquestionably a covered place, a platform or hall, in the forecourt of the temple, set apart

for the king when he visited the temple with his retinue on the Sabbath or feast days." So went forward the abasement of Judah; the Church yielding every trust for the sake of retaining State favour and glory. Jehovah deposed from supremacy in His own Temple, that a corrupt Court might be gratified, and the smile of a depraved king be retained. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy" (1 Cor. iii. 17).—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-20.

An Idolatrous Ruler a National Scourge.

Ahaz inherited the wealth and magnificence that had accumulated under the masterly government of his father, Jotham, and his grandfather, Azariah, but he had also inherited the pernicious effects of luxury and indulgence that ever follow in the train of prosperity. From his earliest years he seems to have fallen into the hands of a court party who championed idolatry, and he never acquired strength of character sufficient to shake off the baleful influence of their teaching and example. He was fundamentally weak. He cringed before the great Assyrian power (ver. 7), but, like all other cowards, he was imperious and exacting towards those who were subject to him (ver. 10-16). Under his feeble and idolatrous administration, Judah sank lower and lower, till it was brought to the verge of ruin. There was nothing to mitigate the successive series of national disasters: his influence upon the nation constantly operated as a blighting, withering curse. Observe—

I. That idolatry becomes a dangerous power in a nation when patronised and encouraged by royalty (ver. 2-4). 1. *The religious leanings of a youthful prince are anxiously scanned.* "Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (ver. 2). The heathen party and the worshippers of Jehovah were on the outlook as to what stand the young king would make. Would he set his face against the idolatrous innovations which had already gone too far; and would he show more zeal and fidelity than his immediate predecessors had done towards the ancient faith? Neither party were kept long in suspense. The old court party triumphed; they had intrigued and flattered to some purpose. The idolatrous tendencies of Ahaz were soon detected; and the emphatic condemnation of the sacred writer was richly merited—he "did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God." It is a sincere grief to the good to witness a reign begun in defiance of the great religious principles which had given life and prestige to the nation. The fate of such a reign it is not difficult to predict. 2. *Idolatrous practices rapidly degenerate to the level of the most atrocious examples* (ver. 3, 4). Ahaz excelled his idolatrous predecessors not only in imbecility, but also in cruelty. He descended to the most inhuman practices of the heathen: he "made his children to pass through the fire"—an abomination against which the Israelites were solemnly warned (comp. Lev. xviii. 21; xx. 24; Deut. xviii. 10). The Jewish rabbis have mildly interpreted this passing through the fire as merely passing between two burning pyres as a purificatory rite; but the truth is, the victims were first slain and then burned (vide 2 Chron. xxviii. 3, compared with Psa. cvi. 37, 38; Jer. vii. 31; xix. 4, 5; Ezek. xvi. 20, 21; xxiii. 37). The brazen image of the idol was made red-hot, and the victim passed within its glowing arms. Other kings of Judah had allowed their people to sacrifice and burn incense in the high places; but Ahaz was the first, so far as we know, to countenance the practice by his own example

(verse 4). Idolatry debauches the moral sense, and prepares its votaries for the worst abominations.

II. That an idolatrous ruler wantonly sacrifices the national prestige and independence (ver. 5-9). 1. *His weakness exposes the nation to invasion and loss* (ver. 5, 6). The kings of Syria and Israel, who had been held in check by the strong hand of Azariah and Jotham, despised the feebleness of Ahaz, and harassed his kingdom with war and siege. They aimed at dethroning Ahaz and substituting a nominee of their own, whom they could compel to unite with them in resisting the encroachments of the Assyrian power. Had Ahaz been decided and open in his attachment to Jehovah, they would not have insulted him and his people with a proposal to form a league with Judah, nor would they have dared to use force. But the idolatry of Ahaz was a sufficient plea for them to take liberties: he was now so much like themselves that they might readily conclude he would be willing to unite with them in any enterprise. When the ruler sinks in moral reputation and force, the stringency of a wholesome government is relaxed, and the nation suffers. 2. *He tamely subjects his people to the oppression of a foreign power* (ver. 7). Judah had injured and oppressed Israel, and could not therefore hope to wean her from her compact with Syria. Israel and Syria had already won two battles against Judah, in which the flower of her troops had been destroyed. Egypt was at this time too weak to afford any assistance, and Ahaz was conscious of serious disaffection spreading among his own people (Isa. vii. 13). In this emergency he abjectly throws himself at the feet of the Assyrian monarch, and piteously implores his help. It might be that this was Judah's only alternative from a point of view: but what a fall was this compared with the days of Azariah and Jotham! There was one resource yet open to Ahaz: he might have fallen back on Jehovah. But his apostacy was too complete and his idolatry too flagrant to allow such a thought to take deep root. Blind with infatuation he runs for refuge into the embrace of a power that ere long uses its advantage in oppressing his people. 3. *He does not scruple to strip the temple of God of its sacred treasures to purchase an idolatrous alliance* "And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria" (ver. 8). Here begins the work of spoliation. It does not appear that he took anything from the shrines of the idols he loved so much—that would be sacrilege in his eyes—and yet without compunction or misgiving he desecrates and robs the temple of Jehovah. In this we have another proof of the debasing influence of his heathenism, and how completely he had severed himself from Jehovah and His worship. The man who turns his back on God is ready for any deed of infamy.

III. That an idolatrous ruler is reckless in the introduction of innovations in worship which are an insult to the only true God (ver. 10-18). 1. *He substitutes a heathen altar in the place of the one used in the worship of Jehovah* (ver. 10). Carried away with the idolatrous ritual of the Assyrians, Ahaz, captivated with the pattern of a certain altar, has one made after the same model and placed in the inner court of the temple. Human fancies and predelictions are indulged in defiance of Divine authority and commandment. The temple altar was made after a Divine pattern (Ex. xxv. 40; xxvi. 30; xxvii. 1); and the introduction of the Assyrian specimen was an insulting and sinful intrusion. 2. *He finds co-workers in those whose duty is to resist all heathenish innovations* (ver. 11-16). The supine conduct of Urijah is in marked contrast with the stout, heroic opposition of Azariah and his priests to the proud assumptions of Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 16-18). Ahaz was too weak a character to have succeeded in winning over Urijah to idolatry, either by threats or cajolery, unless there had been a predisposition on Urijah's part. He

was infected with the theological laxity of the period, and instead of boldly maintaining the absolute supremacy of Jehovah, he was beginning to recognize Him as but one among the many deities to be worshipped. With confused ideas and impaired convictions, Urijah was not prepared to risk the loss of his place and income by opposing the wishes of the capricious monarch. 3. *He adopts methods calculated to disparage and pour contempt on the worship of Jehovah* (ver. 17, 18). We are prepared now for any act of impiety Ahaz may commit. His reverence for God is gone, and with it his reverence for the sanctuary. The sacred vessels are mutilated, the treasures and costly ornaments appropriated to political exigencies, and the royal entrance to the Temple closed. There was no distinction now between Judah and the most idolatrous nations. The safeguard of Judah—the love and worship of Jehovah—was broken down, and the nation soon became a prey to the invader and involved in ruin.

LESSONS :—1. *Idolatry debauches the moral sense of king and people.* 2. *A wicked king will always find those who will imitate him in his most extravagant follies and vices.* 3. *The ruler who systematically ignores the claims of God inevitably drags his people into degradation and suffering.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Under this most wicked prince prophesied Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, and Nahum, but with little good success, so incorrigibly flagitious were now all sorts grown.—*Trapp.*

Verses 2-4. An idolatrous enthusiast—1. Eagerly embraces the advantage gained by his accession to power and authority in propagating his favourite theories. "Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and did not that which was right" (verse 2). 2. Is ever ready to quote and imitate the examples of those whose policy favoured his own views. "He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel" (verse 3). 3. Soon outstrips the most notorious examples, and sinks to the abominations of the rudest heathenism. "Yea, and made his son to pass through the fire" (verse 3). 4. Spreads the blight of his pernicious system in every available place. "He sacrificed in the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree" (verse 4).

Verse 2. The character of this king's reign, the voluptuousness and religious degeneracy of all classes of the people, are graphically portrayed in the writings of Isaiah. The great increase of worldly wealth and luxury in the reigns of Azariah and Jotham had introduced a host of corruptions which, during the reign and by the influence of Ahaz, bore fruit in the idolatrous practices of every kind which prevailed in all parts of the kingdom (see 2 Chron. xxviii. 24).—*Jamieson.*

Verse 3. A man that is once fallen from truth knows not where he shall stay. From the calves of Jeroboam is Ahaz drawn to the gods of the heathen; yea, now bulls and goats are too little for those new deities; his own flesh and blood is but dear enough. Where do we find any religious Israelite thus zealous for God! Neither is our dull and niggardly heart ready to gratify Him with more easy obediences. O God, how gladly should we offer unto thee our souls and bodies, which we may enjoy so much the more when they are thine, since zealous Pagans stick not to lose their own flesh and blood in an idol's fire!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 3, 4. Men are so blind that they think they serve God most truly by those very actions by which they sin most grossly against Him. The Moloch-sacrifice, or child-sacrifice, is a proof of the extravagance of error

into which men can fall when they have not the knowledge of the living God and His revealed blood, or when they have rejected the same (Rom. i. 21, 22). This abomination, which still continues among heathen nations, is the strongest and most direct call to all who know the living God and who possess His Word, to take part in the work of missions, and to help to bring it about that light may come to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. God commands us to give our dearest and best to Him, but not to Moloch. There are no longer any sacrifices to Moloch in Christendom; but it happens often enough, even now, that parents sacrifice their children to the idols of the world which consume them, so that they are lost eternally.—*Lange.*

Verse 4. Wherever God has a Church, the devil builds a temple by the side of it.

Verses 5-9. The disastrous results of national apostasy.—1. The enemy is emboldened to make combined attacks upon the nation (verse 5). 2. Involves loss of prestige and of territory (verse 5). 3. The national spirit is demoralised (verse 7). 4. The nation is put in the power of those who, while professing to help and protect it, drain its resources and ultimately hasten its ruin (verses 7-9).

Verse 7. The more plausible, really the more insane, desire of Ahaz to secure the favour of an empire which was the common enemy of all nations, that he might get rid of the two that were tormenting him, showed that faith had departed from Judah also. The idols of silver and gold had driven God out of its heart, and made the worship of Him a mockery.—*Maurice.*

Verse 10-18. Innovations in Divine worship.—1. Are not to be confounded with an improved fervour and spirituality of service. 2. Are evidences of religious decline. 3. Are an insult to the Divine Being. 4. Should be firmly resisted by the faithful minister of God. 5. May lead to the most reprehensible acts of contempt and sacrilege.

— See in this a clear picture of the lack of Christian spirit in the two highest ranks. The State desires to see everything arranged according to its whims; the Church yields for the sake of the temporal advantage. It is the fashion of depraved rulers that they think they can command in religions as well as in similar matters, and can control everything according to their own good pleasure.—*Lange.*

— A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views. People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors.—*Burke.*

— It is a dangerous presumption to make innovations if but in the circumstances of God's worship. Those human additions, which would seem to grace the institution of God, deprave it. That infinite Wisdom knows best what pleases itself, and prescribes accordingly. The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. Idolatry and falsehood are commonly more gaudy and plausible than truth. That heart which can, for the outward homeliness, despise the ordinances of God, is already alienated from true religion, and lies open to the grossest superstition.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 10. A fit helve for such a hatchet. Urijah had been a maintainer of God's true worship in the temple, and by the prophet Isaiah counted and called a faithful witness (Isa. viii. 1, 2); but now he becometh an apostate, as Damascen turned Mahommedan, after he had written against that execrable impiety; and Ahaz knew him, belike, to be a temporiser.—*Trapp.*

Verse 13. Uzziah, for so doing, was smitten with leprosy; but Ahaz of a far worse disease, an incurable hardness of heart.—*Trapp.*

— For the heathens, and Ahaz's imitation of them, offered the same sorts of offerings to their false gods

which the Israelites did to the true, the devil being noted to be God's ape in his worship.—*Pool.*

Verse 16. We have in this high priest a specimen of those hypocrites and belly-servants who say, "Whose bread I eat, his song I sing;" who veer about with the wind, and seek to be pleasant to all men; dumb dogs who cannot bark; who wish to hurt no one's feelings, but teach and say just what any one wants to hear. But God's word alone, and not the favour of men, nor the goods and honours of the world, ought to be the rule from which we ought not to turn aside, although it may involve risk of life or limb to speak the truth.—*Lange.*

Verses 19, 20. The reign of Ahaz was the most disastrous of any through which Judah had yet passed. The kingdom sank so low, both internally and externally, religiously and politically, that it was on the verge of ruin. Such an incapable ruler had never before ascended the throne. The predominant feature in his character was weakness—weakness of spirit and weakness of intellect. History records nothing about him worthy of respect. —*Bahr.*

— Of all the kings of Judah hitherto, there is none so dreadful an example, either of sin or judgment, as this son of good Jotham. I abhor to think that such a monster should descend from the loins of David. Where should be the period of this wickedness? He began with the high places; thence he descended to the calves of Dan and Bethel; from thence he falls to a Syrian altar, to the Syrian god; then he falls to an utter exclusion of the true God and blocking up His temple; then to the sacrifice of his own son; and at last, as if hell were broken loose on God's inheritance, every several city, every high place of Judah, has a new God. No marvel if he be branded by the Spirit of God —This is that "king Ahaz!"—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 20. His subjects complain that he died so late; and, as repenting that he ever was, denying him a room in the sepulchres of kings, as if they had said—"The common earth of Jerusalem is too good for him that degenerated from his progenitors, spoiled his kingdom, depraved his people, forsook his God.—*Ibid.*

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EXTINCTION OF THE ISRAELITISH KINGDOM.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 2. Did evil . . but not as the kings of Israel—Scripture merely records the fact, does not explain wherein Hoshea sinned less. But even an abstention from wrong, which others wrought, is noticed by Jehovah, and kept in eternal memory. Verse 3. Came up Shalmaneser, king of Assyria—Thirsting for conquest, he subdued the king of the ten tribes, and made him tributary. Shalmaneser's reign followed Tiglath-pileser's, who died B.C. 727. From this Assyrian despot Hoshea after a few years, sought relief by alliance with So, king of Egypt (verse 4). This name —סוא— becomes by punctuation *Sevek*, and is recognized as Shebek of the 25th dynasty. This Ethiopian monarch, lord of Upper Egypt, in the year B.C. 725 invaded Lower Egypt, and proved so mighty a conqueror that the small kingdoms which had groaned beneath the despotism of Assyria turned to him for defence and security. Verse 9. Children of Israel did secretly things not right against the Lord—The word חפא has been rendered variously, as *secret blasphemy, acts of treachery, dissimulating words;* but its meaning, to *cover, cloke*, when taken with דברים, may be accepted as *they hid or concealed Jehovah from attention and homage* by idolatrous intrusions, so that He was ignored. Verse 17. Worshipped all the hosts of heaven—The idol Astarte represented the *moon*, and Moloch (or Baal) the *sun;* and between these they arrayed for worship "all the hosts of heaven." This was an addition to their objects of idolatrous

reverence, and appears as a new feature of Israelitish worship. This astral homage came in upon Israel through the Assyrian alliances by Pekah and Ahaz, for star worship was distinctively an Assyrian importation. Verse 18. Removed Israel out of His sight—After 256 years of separate existence from Judah, the kingdom of the ten tribes thus ignominiously ended, its nationality perished. On this kingdom of Israel lay the twofold sin: first, of revolting from loyal tribes of Judah and Benjamin, thus violating the unity of God's chosen nation; and, next, of revolting against Jehovah and His worship, thus debasing the sacred distinction for which God called them to be His people; therefore Israel became not useless only, but an affront to Jehovah, and was consigned to just retribution. Verse 24. King of Assyria brought men from Babylon, &c.—Had the land been depopulated there would have seemed promise of the exiles' return; but under the royal direction Assyrian subjects came in and possessed the sacred soil, making it the home of foreigners. This king, called here מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר is regarded by many expositors as Esarhaddon; but a doubt naturally springs from the fact that Esarhaddon did not come to the throne for some twenty-six years after Shalmanezer, who carried Israel into captivity. From Ezra iv. 2 we gain information that Esarhaddon brought these colonists into Samaria. Verse 27. Carry thither one of the priests - The country was too thinly populated to subdue the growth of those beasts of prey by which the land had been infested prior to its occupancy by Israel (Judges xiv. 5; 1 Sam. xvii. 34, &c); now they again multiplied and ravaged the country. Interpreting this as a judgment from God for the neglect of His worship, an exiled priest was sent back to the people to teach them Jehovah's will. And from this event arose that mingled religion which became distinctive of the Samaritans; also the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch, which acquired such historic importance. Verse 30. The men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth—"Booths of the daughters," *i. e.*, tents of voluptuousness, where lust was sanctioned as a religious observance. Nergal—Identified in the British Museum inscriptions as Mars, the god of war. Ashima—a goat idol. Nibhaz—a dog. Tartak—an ass, or planet of ill omen. Adrammelech—Either Moloch the Assyrian sun-god; or, as others think, a mule or a peacock. Anammelech—An idol in form of a hare. Thus the Samaritans became a people of varied religious forms and vagaries, the true worship and knowledge of God being perverted by the rival heathenish fallacies and rites which the immigrants of Babylon had brought into the land. So even though Jehovah was in some way "feared" (verse 32), idolatry was fostered, and they "served their graven images" through generations following (verse 41).—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-6.

The Utter Downfall of Israel.

I. **Was effected notwithstanding the superior capacity and modified idolatry of the ruler.**—Hoshea "did that which was evil, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him" (verse 2). He did not enforce the edicts of Baal with such determined fanaticism as some of his predecessors. He allowed more liberty in religious worship, and while not approaching the true worship of Jehovah, he did not descend to the abominations of the lowest heathenism. Some have thought that the last king of Israel was the worst; but the history does not favour that view. He was a man of considerable military and political capacity. It is true he reached the throne by violence and bloodshed (chap. xv. 30); but the people were weary of national abuses and of the imbecility of their kings, and welcomed the advent of any one who had the courage and vigour to rectify matters. Hoshea yearned for liberty, and his whole reign was spent in repeated efforts to cast off the foreign yoke, to excite a more enterprising national spirit, and to arrest the downward tendency of the kingdom. But no human power could now save Israel. The ablest generalship, the most consummate statesmanship, the cleverest combinations, were all in vain. It was a melancholy sight to see this man grappling with a falling kingdom, whose ruin he was powerless to prevent.

II. **Was accomplished notwithstanding the most brave and desperate struggles for continued existence** (verses 4, 5).—Hoshea saw the mistake

that Menahem and Pekah had made in calling in the assistance of Assyria, and what had been the sad results to the country. He made a bold stand for national freedom. He refused to pay tribute, and prepared to withstand the fury of the great Assyrian power. It is a tribute to the superior diplomacy of Hosea that he succeeded in persuading So, the warrior king of Egypt, that it was their mutual safety to oppose Assyria; and though So was but a fickle colleague, he must have rendered considerable assistance until he was obliged to retire within his own kingdom and defend himself from the common enemy. The fact that Samaria held out for three years against the Assyrian army, with all its formidable appliances for siege and assault, indicates the obstinacy and desperation of the defence. They were the last frantic efforts of despair.

"It is remarkable," says Ewald, "how strong a resemblance the fall of Samaria bears to the first and second destructions of Jerusalem, in the heroic resistance of its inhabitants."

III. **Was associated with scenes of humiliation and suffering** (verses 5, 6). Israel was afflicted with all the terrible consequences of war—war carried on by an enemy who was determined to win. The horrors of the siege of Samaria may be inferred from Isaiah xxviii. 1-4; Hosea x. 14; xiii. 16; Amos vi. 9-14. Added to the chagrin of defeat, was the degradation of enforced captivity and estrangement—torn from the midst of loved and familiar scenes, and placed in a strange and distant country, subject to the sarcasms and, it may be, cruelty of its inhabitants. The people who had been delivered from Egyptian slavery by the strong arm of Jehovah are again relegated to bondage, because they had abandoned their Deliverer. The punishment for sin is ever attended with suffering and shame.

IV. **Was inevitable, as the opportunity for reformation had passed unimproved.**—Instruction had been despised, reproof unheeded, the best of prophets ignored, prosperity abused, and repeated overtures of mercy callously spurned. The time for compromise was passed, the opportunity of salvation was sinned away. Nothing remained but to allow the national infatuation to run its course and produce its inevitable results. The nation must reap what it had sown; it had sown the wind, and must reap the whirlwind. A certain king once caused a lamp to be lit in his palace, and a proclamation made throughout his dominion that every rebel who came and tendered his submission before the light burnt out should be forgiven, whatever the nature of his offence; but that those who refused to obey the summons within the required time should be put to death. The lamp of Israel's opportunity had long been lit, and the conditions of submission made sufficiently public. When therefore the light became extinct, and Israel refused to return, the threatened punishment must inevitably follow. Shakespeare says truly of opportuity, "Who seeks, and will not take when once 'tis offered, shall never find it more."

LESSONS:—1. *It is not in the power of any one man unaided to save a kingdom.* 2. *National sins involve national ruin.* 3. *Every nation, as every individual, has ample opportunities for reformation.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 1-6. **A doleful picture of national desolation.** 1. Fanatical persistence in the evil that works its ruin (ver. 2). 2. Vainly seeking the protection of foreign powers (ver. 3, 4). 3. The country overrun and impoverished by hosts of invading foes (ver. 5). 4. Struggling bravely, but uselessly, against superior numbers (ver. 5, 6). 5. Draughted un-

resistingly into strange and distant lands (ver. 16). 6. An imprisoned king and scattered people.

— The last king of Israel. I. *He did that which was evil, but not as the kings of Israel before him.* Though he did not go so far in wickedness as the eighteen kings who preceded him, nevertheless, he did not walk in the way of salvation. Half-way conversion is no conversion. In order to bring back the nation from its wicked ways, he should have been himself devoted to the Lord with all his heart. When people are not fully in earnest in their conversion, then there is no cessation of corruption, whether it be the case of an individual or a state. II. *He makes a covenant with the king of Egypt* (ver. 4). By this he showed that his heart was not perfect with God. Egypt, the very power out of whose hand God had wonderfully rescued his people, was to help him against Assyria. But "cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm" (Jer. xvii. 5; Hosea vii. 11-13). III. *He loses his land and his people, and is cast into prison.* By conspiracy and murder he had attained to the throne and to the highest pitch of human greatness, but his end was disgrace, misery, and life-long imprisonment. Upon him who will not be humbled by small evils God sends great and heavy ones.—*Lange.*

Ver. 2. Wickedness—1. May be modified in its enormity. 2. Every modification observed and impartially recorded. 3. Modification does not alter its nature, or escape its punishment.

— It looks like the bitter irony of fate that this Hosea, who was to be the last king, was a better one than any of his predecessors. The words of the prophets who had uttered so many and such important truths concerning this kingdom during the last fifty years, many have exercised a powerful influence over him and instilled into him better principles. But they had always predicted its fall as certain; and now the irresistible force of history was to prove that no single man, whatever might be his position and superiority, could be strong enough to delay the ruin of the whole structure, if the right moment for its reformation had passed. —*Ewald.*

Ver. 3. Payment of tribute. 1. A humiliating evidence of subjection (ver. 3). 2. Chafes the spirit of a liberty-loving people (ver. 4). 3. Brings disaster if ineffectually resisted (ver. 4).

Ver. 5. As the end drew near, they gave themselves up to the frantic revellings of despair. At last the city was stormed. With the ferocity common to all the warfare of those times, the infants were hurled down the rocky sides of the hill on which the city stood, or destroyed in their mothers' bosoms. Famine and pestilence completed the work of war. The stones of the ruined city were poured down into the rich valley below, and the foundations were laid bare. Palace and hovel alike fell; the statues were broken to pieces; the crown of pride, the glory of Ephraim, was trodden under foot.—*Stanley.*

Ver. 6. The fall of Samaria and Damascus was, according to the prediction of the prophet, synchronous (Isa. vii. 7-9); and the devastation both of Syria and Israel was foretold at a time and in circumstances when no human sagacity could have anticipated it (Amos i).—*Jamieson.*

— O terrible examples of vengeance upon that peculiar people whom God had chosen for Himself out of all the world! All the world were witnesses of the favours, of the miraculous deliverances and protections; all the world shall be witnesses of their just confusion. It is not in the power of slight errors to set off that infinite mercy. What was it, O God, what was it that caused Thee to cast off Thine inheritance? What but the same that made Thee cast the angels out of heaven—even their rebellious sins. Those sins dared to emulate the greatness of Thy mercies, no less than they forced the severity of Thy judgments.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 7-23

IDOLATRY THE DESTRUCTIVE FORCE IN NATIONAL LIFE.

FROM the lengthy review embraced by this paragraph we again obtain a glimpse into the moral purpose of the historian of kings. In the writer's estimation everything is to be subordinated to the setting forth of the Divine purpose in raising up the Hebrew people, and the miseries that came upon them for the violation of their part of the covenant. The rise and fall of dynasties, the conduct of great battles, the advance of the nation in commercial prosperity and civilization, the notice of contemporary nations, are all dismissed with the briefest reference; but whatever affects the theocratic aspect of the history is described with significant fullness of detail. The downfall of Israel was a catastrophe so momentous that the historian pauses in the midst of his narrative to enlarge upon its moral aspects. One of the most impressive lessons we learn in this review is that *Idolatry is the great destructive force in national life.* Observe—

I. That idolatry demoralises the national spirit. 1. *It weakens the sense of moral obligation to obey the Divine law* (ver. 12). When Israel was rescued out of Egyptian bondage, they became God's covenant people, and pledged themselves to obey Him. The fact of this great and signal deliverance stands at the head of the covenant law (Ex. xx. 2), and is always cited as the chief and fundamental act of the Divine favour (Lev. xi. 45; Josh. xxiv. 17; 1 Kings viii. 51; Psa. lxxxi. 10; Jer. ii. 6). The discipline of the wilderness and the awful displays of the Divine power and majesty, were intended to divest them of the remnants of heathenism that still clung to them, and to instruct them in the knowledge and worship of the only True God. Every relapse into idolatry was a loss of moral stamina, weakened the bonds of obligation, and made obedience more difficult. We have need to be on our guard every moment against the seductive lures of idolatry—all the more dangerous because there is so much in us ever ready to respond to its bewitching overtures. We have need, in moments of temptation, to cultivate towards our Heavenly Father the artless simplicity of the child who, in a state of alarm, ran to his parent, and cried, "Mother, my goodness grows weak—help me!" 2. *It leads its votaries into the lowest depths of wickedness* (ver. 7-11, and 15—17). In these verses we have the genesis and career of the idolater graphically portrayed. Distaste and neglect of the Divine statutes and commandments—a preference and love for other gods—secret indulgence, unblushing publicity—enforcing by statute on others what he had at first but timidly practised himself; a more complete wrenching away from his allegiance to Jehovah; a defiant, menacing attitude assumed; utter rejection of God; reckless and unreserved abandonment to his self-chosen deities; "selling himself to do evil"; infatuated devotion to the most revolting practices; the end, desolation and ruin.

II. That idolatry hardens its victims against the most faithful warnings and appeals (ver. 13, 14). Israel was not allowed to drift to her fate unchecked and unwarned; the most gifted prophets of the Hebrew school were sent to instruct and admonish the people. Doubtless some gave heed to their teachers, and mourned over the infatuation of their countrymen. But the bulk of the nation, following the lead of those high in authority, shut their ears to instruction, disdained reproof, and persevered in their sins. It is illustrative of the subtle, dangerous power of idolatry, that it renders its votaries so oblivious to the truth and so impervious to its strokes. The action of water, which, in an early stage, will soften a given substance when continued incessantly, only petrifies it the more; so is it with the moral influence of truth: the nature that was once easily melted is now defiant and obdurate.

III. That idolatry involves the nation in decay and ruin (ver. 18-23). In these verses the writer takes pains to show that their idolatry was the parent of every other sin that weakened and degraded the national character. The heroism and compact union which rendered them invincible in days when Jehovah was honoured and worshipped no longer existed, and they became an easy prey to the spoiler. The Knights of St. John of Malta, in the early period of the order, were remarkable for their devout Christian spirit as well as for bravery and prowess. In 1565 they defended the island against 30,000 Turks. When, after incredible acts of heroism and endurance on both sides, the fortress of St. Elmo fell, the Turkish commander, looking from its ruined bastions across the harbour at the lofty ramparts of St. Angelo, exclaimed, "What will not the parent cost us when the child has been gained at so fearful a price!" He was obliged to raise the seige, and of the 30,000 Turks scarcely 10,000 found their way back to Constantinople. What was invincible to warfare in the 16th century yielded too easily to bribery and corruption in the 18th. The gold of Napoleon accomplished what the combined forces of Turkey had failed to do; and as Napoleon entered the gates of Malta, General Caffarelli remarked to him, glancing at the massive defences, "It is fortunate we have some one to admit us, for we should never have got in of ourselves." So greatly had the knights of 1798 degenerated from the brave defenders of St. Elmo in 1565. The nation, as the individual, is strong only as it is genuinely religious: decay in piety means decay in all that gives greatness and permanence to a nation.

LESSONS:— 1. *Whatever lowers the national moral tone is a calamity.* 2. *Idolatry is an audacious attempt to live without God in everything.* 3. *The nation that persistently ignores God will come to naught—it produces in itself the elements that shall destroy it.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 7-23. A review of the moral causes of national decay.— 1. Civil dissension and revolt (verses 21-23). 2. Flagrant abandonment of God (verses 15, 16). 3. Voluntary choice and practice of grossest idolatry (verses 8-12). 4. Habitual neglect of prophetic warning and instruction (verses 13, 14).

— Their iniquity was their ruin. Out of Hosea and Amos their sins may be gathered; and especially their abominable idolatry, contempt of God's prophets, and abuse of His benefits. Of the ruin of the Greek empire the historian assigns these for the chief causes: First, the innovation and change of their ancient religion, whereof ensued a world of woes; then covetousness, coloured with the name of good husbandry, the utter destruction of the chief strength of the empire; next envy, the ruin of the great; false suspect, the looser of friends; ambition, honour's overthrow; distrust, the great mind's torment; and foreign aid, the empire's unfaithful porter, opening the gate even to the enemy himself.—*Trapp.*

— Here where the kingdom of the ten tribes comes to an end and disappears for ever from history, was the place for casting a glance back upon its development and history. This the writer does from the old Testament standpoint, according to which God chose the people of Israel to be His own peculiar people, made a covenant with it, and took it under His special guidance and direction for the welfare and salvation of all nations. The breach of the covenant by the Northern Kingdom is in his view the first, the peculiar, and the only cause of its final fall, and this fall is the judgment of the holy and just God. If he had not known that this covenant law, in the form in which he was familiar

with it, had existed long before the division of the kingdom, he could not have declared so distinctly and decidedly that the fall of the kingdom of the ten tribes was a Divine judgment upon it for its apostacy from that law.—*Lange.*

— Would that men, when they read such passages, would stop and think, and would enter upon a comparison between the peoples of God at that time and of this, and would thus make application of the lesson of history. The people of Israel were hardly as wicked as the Christians of to-day. The responsibility of to-day is far greater, for they were called to righteousness under the old law, we under the Gospel of free grace. The people of the Ten Tribes did not reject belief in God at first; but, contrary to the law of this God, they made to themselves an image of Him. This was the beginning of their downfall, the germ of their ruin. This led from error to error. They commenced with an image of Jehovah; they finished with the frightful sacrifices of Moloch. He who has once abandoned the centre of revealed truth, sinks inevitably deeper and deeper, either into unbelief or into superstition, so that he finally comes to consider darkness light, and folly wisdom. So it was in Israel, so it is now in Christendom. He who abandons the central truth of Christianity—Christ, the Son of God—is in the way of losing God. A nation which no longer respects the Word of God, but makes a religion for itself, according to its own good pleasure, will sooner or later come to ruin.—*Ibid.*

Verses 9-12. **The progressive development of evil.**—1. Begins in secret. 2. Gradually gains the mastery over conscientious scruples. 3. Soon acquires a shameless effrontery in public. 4. Becomes universally established by popular usage and example. 5. Reckless of consequences, to either God or man, cares not how deeply God is grieved or man is injured.

Verse 9. They hid, or covered, or cloaked over what they did; but in vain; for God is all eye, and to Him dark things appear, dumb things answer, silence itself maketh confession.—*Trapp.*

Verse 12. But they did it the rather; taking occasion by the law, that their sin might appear to be exceeding sinful (Rom. vii. 13). Such is the canker of our vile natures, that the more God forbids a thing, the more we bid for it.—*Ibid.*

Verse 13. **The obduracy of impenitence.**—1. Is coldly indifferent alike to warning or entreaty (verse 13). 2. Is intensified by persistent unbelief (verse 14). 3. Is confirmed in its defiant attitude by the character of its daily worship (verse 15). 4. Utterly rejects every vestige of Divine authority and guidance (verse 16). 5. Voluntarily abandons itself to the most debasing practices (verse 17). 6. Inevitably incurs the Divine displeasure (verse 18).

Verse 13. Neither were these slips of frailty, or ignorant mistakings, but wilful crimes, obstinate impieties, in spite of the doctrines, reproofs, menaces, and miraculous convictions of the holy prophets. Thy destruction is of thyself, O Israel! What could the just hand of the Almighty do less than consume a nation so incorrigibly flagitious—a nation so unthankful for mercies, so impatient of remedies, so incapable of repentance. What nation under heaven can now challenge an indefeasible interest in God, when Israel itself is cast off? He that spared not the natural olive, shall He spare the wild?—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 16. "And worshipped all the host of heaven." It is not easy to determine the exact form which the worship of the heavenly bodies took in the various nations of Western Asia. The purest form of star worship was that of the Assyrio-Persian Magism; it admitted of no images of the Deity, and in its adoration of the heavenly bodies it drew its deepest inspiration

from the thought of their perfect beauty. This was the *cultus* to which Job felt himself tempted when he "beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness" (Job xxxi. 26, compared with Deut. iv. 19). A second mode of regarding the stars was that of the Phœnicians, by whom they were looked upon as the originators of the growth and decay of nature—the embodiment of the creative and regenerative principle; and from this view there was readily developed a further symbolism, which led ere long to the grossest idolatries. The third great system of astral worship was that whose leading tendency was to dwell rather on the contemplation of the eternal unchangeableness of the heavenly bodies, as contrasted with the chances and changes of this transitory life. This was the form most common among the Chaldeans, and naturally produced the astrology for which they were famous. It is not always possible to determine which form of the worship of the host of heaven was that which presented itself as a temptation to the children of Israel. On the whole, we may assume it to have been the second, not only from the connection in which it is mentioned, but also from the circumstances of the case.—*Wilkins' Phœnicia and Israel.*

Verse 17. "And they sold themselves to to do evil in the sight of the Lord." The responsibility of the sinner. 1. Is grounded in his freedom of volition. 2. Is abused by every act of iniquity he voluntarily commits. 3. Cannot be destroyed by the most frantic efforts of self-forgetfulness and sin. 4. Will one day make him terribly conscious how deeply he has offended God.

Verse 18. The kingdom of Israel had nineteen kings, and not one of them was truly pious. Wonder not at the wrath, but at the patience of God in that He endured their evil ways for many hundred years, and at their ingratitude that they did not allow themselves, by His long-suffering, to be brought to repentance. Is it any better now-a-days?—*Lange.*

— Speaking humanly, the state was past redemption; the utter corruption and impenitence of the people are attested by the denunciations of Hosea, and confirmed by their scornful rejection of Hezekiah's call to repentance and union. Even the king was only some shades better than his predecessors; and it was no partial reform that could save and renew the state. Viewing the case from the higher ground taken throughout the Scripture history—the inseparable connection between national prosperity or adversity, and religious obedience or rebellion—we cannot say that it was too late for Israel to be saved; as Sodom would have been, if five righteous men had been found in her; as Nineveh was, when her people repented at the preaching of Jonah. They had only forty days of grace; Hoshea and his people had three years. Had the king of Israel made common cause with Hezekiah, and thrown himself upon the protection of Jehovah, we have a right to believe that the times of David might have returned. But Hoshea took the very course denounced by the law of Moses—reliance upon Egypt. His sudden destruction is compared by the prophet Hosea to the disappearance of foam upon the water.—*Dr. Smith's Student Scripture History.*

Verses 20-23. A God-forsaken people. 1. The fruit of obstinate and continued disobedience (verse 22). 2. Become a prey to suffering and spoliation (verse 20). 3. Cannot but observe the contrast between the goodness and patience of God, and the cruelty of their despotic conquerors (verses 21, 23). 4. May be restored, if the Divine favour be sought in penitence and humble submission.

Ver. 23. The ultimate fate of the Ten Tribes of Israel. The main body of the inhabitants were transplanted to the remotest provinces of the Assyrian empire. After this it is difficult to discover any distinct trace of

the Northern tribes. Some returned with their countrymen of the Southern kingdom.. In the New Testament there is special mention of the tribe of Asher, and the ten tribes generally are on three emphatic occasions ranked with others (James i. 1; Acts xxvi. 7; Rev. vii. 5-8). The immense Jewish population which made Babylonia a second Palestine was in part derived from them; and the Jewish customs that have been discovered in the Nestorian Christians, with the traditions of the sect itself, may indicate at any rate a mixture of Jewish descent. That they are concealed in some unknown region of the earth is a fable with no foundation either in history or prophecy.—*Stanley.*

— There has been a wide-spread belief among modern Christians that the Ten Tribes, having never returned to their native country, must still exist somewhere in a collected body. Travellers have thought to discover them in Malabar, in Kashmir, in China, in Turkistan, in Afghanistan, in the Kurdish mountains, in Arabia, in Germany, in North America. Books have been written advocating this or that identification, and the notion has thus obtained extensive currency that somewhere or other in the world the descendants of the Ten Tribes must exist, and that when found they might be recognized as such by careful and diligent enquiry. It seems to have been forgotten that, in the first place, they were scattered over a wide extent of country (Harran, Chalcitis, Gozan, or Mygdonia and Media) by the original conquerors; that, secondly, in the numerous conquests and changes of populations which are known to have taken place in these regions they would naturally become more scattered; that, thirdly, a considerable number of them probably returned with the Jews under Zerubbabel and Ezra (Ezr. vi. 17; viii. 35; 1 Chron. ix. 3); that, fourthly, those who remained behind would naturally either mingle with the heathen among whom they lived, or become united with the Jews of the dispersion; and that, fifthly, if there had been anywhere in this part of Asia at the time of Alexander's conquests, or of the Roman expeditions against Parthia and Persia, a community of the peculiar character supposed, it is most improbable that no Greek or Roman historian or geographer should have mentioned it. Against these arguments there is nothing to be set but a statement of Josephus, in the first century of our era, that the Ten Tribes still existed beyond the Euphrates in his day (he does not say in a collective form); and a similar declaration of Jerome in the fifth. Neither writer has any personal acquaintance with the countries, or speaks from his own knowledge. Both may be regarded as relating rather what they supposed must be, than what they knew actually was the case. Again, neither may mean more than that among the Hebrews of the dispersion (Acts ii. 9) in Parthia, Media, Elam, and Mesopotamia were many Israelites. On the whole, therefore, it would seem probable (1) That the Ten Tribes never formed a community in their exile, but were scattered from the first; and (2) That their descendants either blended with the heathen and were absorbed, or returned to Palestine with Zerubbabel and Ezra, or became inseparably united with the dispersed Jews in Mesopotamia and the adjacent countries. No discovery, therefore, of the Ten Tribes is to be expected, nor can any works written to prove their identity with any existing race or body of persons be regarded as anything more than ingenious exercitations.—*Speaker's Comm.*

— Esdras has a vision of the Ten Tribes separating themselves from the heathen and migrating to a distant land, never before inhabited by men (2 Esdras xiii. 40-47). Perhaps this vision of Esdras was the starting point of all the speculations about the "Lost Tribes," for they have been lost and found in nearly every part of Asia, Europe, and North America. But vague traditional tales and ingenious speculations are of little weight to counter-balance the abund

ant testimony of Scripture on the subject, which may be stated as follows: —1. *A considerable portion of the Israelitish population never went into the Assyrian exile.* The first deportations were by Pul and Tiglath-Pileser, and in all probability were composed of fewer captives than Sargon carried away after the capture of Samaria and the fall of the Northern Kingdom. Sargon's inscription, which would not be likely to make too low an estimate, mentions 27,280 captives; but the Northern Kingdom must surely have had a population far exceeding these numbers. Multitudes were of course slain in the siege of Samaria and in previous wars; but supposing the captives to be ten times the number given, what became of all the rest of Israel, which in David's time numbered 800,000 warriors, which implied a population of many millions (2 Sam. xxiv. 9). Only the cities of Samaria seem to have been depopulated, so that in other and remoter districts of the kingdom a larger majority of the populaton seem to have been left to care for the land. Thus the *Kingdom* of the Ten Tribes ceased to exist; but numerically the mass of the people were left in their ancient homes. Certain it is that they were not all carried into exile. 2. *The captives were not allowed to settle in one district.* Perhaps a majority were placed in Halah and along the Habor; but others, and how large a proportion does not appear, were scattered abroad in various cities of Media. This fact of their being scattered throughout various parts of the vast Assyrian empire argues against the notion of their continuing their tribal distinctions, and especially of their perpetuating the Ten Tribes as an organized community. 3. *There is reason to believe that after the fall of Samaria the old enmity between Judah and Israel began to cease.* In the reign of Hezekiah numbers of the tribes of Israel accepted the public invitation to celebrate the Passover at Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxx.); and at the close of the Passover "all Israel that were present went out" and destroyed all the signs of idolatry "out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh" (*ib.* xxxi. 1). The like thing was done by Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 19; 2 Chron. xxxvii. 7; xxxv. 8). Such a coming together in their now oppressed land would rapidly efface from Judah and Israel their ancient bitterness and jealousy. The better portion of all the people would see and obey the manifest will of Jehovah, and the rest, having no bond of union, would gradually die and fade away. 4. *The prophets, with one voice, represent both Judah and Israel returning together from their exile.* More than a century after the fall of Samaria, Judah also was led into exile, and Jeremiah, who flourished at that time, began at once to comfort them with prophecies of a restoration. (Compare Jer. iii. 18; xxx. 3; xxxiii. 7; l. 4; Ezek xxxvii. 21, 22; Isa. xi. 11-13; xiv. 1; Hosea i. 11; Micah ii. 12). So we may believe that the chastisement of the exile not only cleansed all Israel from idolatry, but also utterly crushed out the tribal feuds and jealousies. Some of these prophecies are doubtless Messianic, but all have more or less to show that in their exile Judah and Israel became united in all their higher sympathies and hopes, and were thus prepared, whenever opportunity offered, to return together to the land of their fathers. 5. Finally: *All we know of the subsequent history of Israel tends to show that in the lands of their exile, and elsewhere, Judah and Israel became largely intermingled.* It is likely many of the exiles from Judah were settled in cities and districts already occupied by descendants of those Israelites from the cities of Samaria, who had been carried off by the Assyrian kings more than a century before. Since the captivity the common name for all Israelites, wherever scattered abroad, is *Jews.* With the fall of Samaria, "the kingdom of the house of Israel" had no longer an existence, but was largely absorbed by Judah; and therefore it is not to be wondered at that no express mention is made of descendants of the Ten Tribes returning along with Judah from exile. But there

were vast multitudes of Judah and Israel that never accepted the offer to return to the father-land. They are spoken of as "scattered abroad" in the Persian empire (Esther iii. 8). They are referred to on the day of Pentecost as "out of every nation under heaven" (Acts ii. 5-10).) Josephus speaks of the great numbers of Jews who, in his time, dwelt in Babylon, Mesopotamia, and beyond the Euphrates (Antiq. xv. 22; iii. 1; xviii. 9, 1). Paul speaks of "our Twelve Tribes" Acts xxvi. 7); and James addressed his Epistle "to the Twelve Tribes scattered abroad." From all this we infer, that after the Babylonish exile, the old dominion of "Judah and Israel" became lost—all the scattered tribes became intermixed, no one region held any one tribe, or any definite number of tribes—the name of Jews was applied to them all; the Ten Tribes, as a distinct nation, had long ceased to exist, and the whole body of Israelites throughout the world became amalgamated into one people, recognizing themselves as the descendants and representatives of the twelve ancient tribes.—*Whedon.*

—Respecting the fate of the captives we have had the statement of their transplantation to certain districts of Assyria and Media, where we almost lose sight of them. Nor is this surprising. The gradual contraction of the limits of the Samaritan kingdom suggests, what the inscription of Sargon confirms, that the numbers carried captive at last were far less considerable than is commonly supposed. Their absorption in the surrounding population would be aided by their long addiction to the practices of idolatry; and the loss of reverence for their religion involved absence of care for the records of their national existence. As they furnished no confessors and martyrs, like Daniel and "the three children," so neither did they preserve the genealogies on which Judah based the order of the restored commonwealth. But yet their traces are not utterly lost. The fact that a priest was found among them, to teach the Samaritans to fear Jehovah, proves that they maintained some form of worship in His name. The Book of Tobit preserves the record of domestic piety among captives of the tribe of Naphthali. After the great captivity of Judah, it is most interesting to see how continually Ezekiel addresses the captives by the name of *Israel.* The prophetic symbol of the rod of Judah and "the rod of the children of Israel his *companions*" being joined into one, in order to their restoration as one nation, as Isaiah also had predicted, seems to imply that all that was worth preserving in Israel became amalgamated with Judah, and either shared in the restoration, or became a part of the "dispersion" who were content to remain behind, and who spread the knowledge of the true God throughout the East. The edict of Cyrus, addressed to the servants of Jehovah, God of *Israel,* would find a response beyond the tribe of Judah, and though none of the Ten Tribes appear, *as such,* among the returned exiles, there is room for many of their families in the number of those who could not prove their pedigrees. As for the rest, according to the very images of the prophet,

> Like the dew on the mountain,
> Like the foam on the river,
> Like the bubble on the fountain,
> They are gone, and FOR EVER.

The very wildness of the speculations of those who have sought them at the foot of the Himalayas and on the coast of Malabar, among the Nestorians of Abyssinia and the Indians of North America, proves sufficiently the hopelessness of the attempt. Have, then, the promises of God concerning their restoration failed? No! They were represented, as we have seen, in the return of Judah; and for the rest, though they are lost to us, "the Lord knoweth them that are His." When God shall reveal out of every nation those who have "feared God and wrought righteousness," all the tribes of believers in Israel will be owned, in some special manner, as His people. That this restoration will not

be temporal, but spiritual, seems to be the plain teaching of St. Paul in the passage which forms the great New Testament authority on the whole subject (Rom. ix—xi).—*Dr. Smith's Student Scripture History.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 24-41.

Religious Compromise.

I. That religious compromise is the offspring of human fear (verse 24-28). The incursion and ravages of the lions and wild beasts that multiplied so rapidly in the Jordan Valley and the forests of Samaria filled the now scattered inhabitants with dread. Regarding their sufferings as an indication of the anger of some local deity, they were anxious to be instructed in "the manner of the god of the land." Thus it came to pass that Jehovah was worshipped as one of many other deities. Fear—fear of consequences, fear of offending, fear of suffering—leads to the most calamitous compromises. "In morals," says a certain writer, "what begins in fear usually ends in wickedness; in religion, what begins in fear usually ends in fanaticism. Fear, either as a principle or a motive, is the beginning of all evil."

II. That religious compromise is ever productive of error and confusion (verse 29-34). What a curious and pitiable jumble of creeds and deities we have here! It is an illustration of what must happen when man is left to himself. The key-note of the paragraph is verse 33—"They feared the Lord and served their own gods." They sought to accomplish the impossible—to blend what can never be united, as there are certain metals that can never weld together, and certain fluids that can never coalesce. One part of the day the worshipper enters the temple of Jehovah, and at another part the temple of Succoth-Benoth. So confused and mixed a cultus could not but produce serious misconceptions of religion in the minds of both old and young. The haphazard mixture of glaring colours in the pattern offends the eye and vitiates the taste.

III. That religious compromise creates a class of inferior and incompetent teachers. "They made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests" (verse 32). There is in the sinful human heart that which responds too readily to what is broad and vague in religious thought. Eccentricity of religious opinion has many imitators. It is an easy matter to procure teachers—and sometimes men gifted with no mean intellectual ability—who are willing to teach what is agreeable to believe and pleasant to practise. A false system of religion never lacks advocates, such as they are.

> The sweet words
> Of Christian promise, words that even yet
> Might stem destruction, were they wisely preached,
> Are muttered o'er by men, whose tones proclaim
> How flat and wearisome they feel their trade:
> Rank scoffers some, but most too indolent
> To redeem their falsehoods, or to know their truth.
>
> *Coleridge.*

IV. That the claims of true religion admit of no compromise (verses 35-41). In these verses the writer rehearses the terms of the covenant between Jehovah and His people, and shows that nothing short of full submission and obedience could be acceptable to God. Religion is a necessity of the soul. "The ivy cannot grow alone; it *must* twine around some support or other; if not the goodly oak, then the ragged thorn; round any dead stick whatever, rather than have no stay or support at all. It is even so with the heart and

affections of man; if they do not twine around God, they must twine around some meaner thing." True religion demands the absolute surrender of the whole man to God. When he begins to hesitate, to palter, to compromise, he begins to drift away from God. The Divine claims become an irksome bondage He seeks to snap one fetter of obligation after another; but when he has snapped the last fetter, as he thinks—a belief in a personal God—he has still *himself* left. Which is preferable—the golden fetters of a righteous and impartial Ruler, or the tyranny of a Frankenstein monster, generated from the dreary swamps of a perverted self? It is dangerous to trifle with the absolute claims of true religion.

LESSONS:—1. *Compromise may be useful in settling external difficulties, but is inadmissible when it touches vital principles.* 2. *The man who compromises religious principle, loses caste with those to whom he yields, and loses strength in himself.* 3. *The claims of Jehovah should be reverently recognised and faithfully observed.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 24-28. **The religion of fear.** 1. To be carefully distinguished from a spirit of reverential awe. 2. Is based on a natural dread of suffering and calamity (verse 25). 3. Will pay court to any deity who promises protection and safety (verse 26). 4. Readily listens to any teacher who professes to know anything about the deity who is dreaded (verses 27, 28).

Verse 25. Not the veriest Pagan can be excused for his ignorance of God. Even the most depraved nature might teach us to tremble at a Deity. The brute creatures are sent to revenge the quarrel of their Maker. Still hath God left himself champions in Israel. Lions tear the Assyrians in pieces, and put them in mind that, had it not been for wickedness, the land needed not to have changed masters. The great Lord of the world cannot want means to plague offenders. There is no security but in being at peace with God.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 26. These blind heathens that think every land hath a several god, yet hold that god worthy of worship; yet hold that worship must be grounded upon knowledge, the want of that knowledge punishable, the punishment of that want just and divine. How much worse than Assyrians are they who are ready to ascribe all calamities to nature, to chance!—who, acknowledging but one God, are yet careless to know and serve Him!—*Ibid.*

Verse 29-33. **Polytheism.** 1. Bewilders the worshipper by the multiplicity of gods (verses 29-31). 2. Is not scrupulous as to the character of its priests (verse 32). 3. Makes no distinction between the only true God and false deities (verse 33). 4. Can never meet the deepest needs of man's nature.

— A country cannot fall lower than it does when each man makes unto himself his own god. We are indeed beyond the danger of making to ourselves idols of wood and stone, silver and gold; but we are none the less disposed to form idols for ourselves out of our own imaginatons, and not to fear and worship the one true God as He has revealed Himself to us. That is the cultivated heathenism of the present day. Some make to themselves a god who dwells above the stars, and does not care much for the omissions or commissions of men upon earth. Others, one who can do anything but chastise and punish, or one in whose sight men forgive themselves their own sins; who does not recompense each according to his works but forgives all without discrimina

tion, and who opens heaven to all alike, no matter how they have lived upon earth.—*Lange.*

— What a prodigious mixture was here of religions—true with false, Jewish with Pagan, divine with devilish! Every division of these transplanted Assyrians had their several deities, high places, sacrifices. No beggar's coat is more pieced than the religion of these inhabitants of Israel. I know not how their bodies sped for the lions; I am sure their souls fared the worse for this medley. Above all things God hates a mongrel devotion. If we be not all Israel, it were better to be all Ashur. It cannot so much displease God to be unknown or neglected, as to be consorted with idols. —*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 34-41. The sin of disobedience. 1. All the more grievous when it is the violation of solemn covenant. 2. When committed against a Being who has wrought out great deliverances and bestowed signal blessing. 3. When it is a breach of the plainest and oft-repeated commandments. 4. When it is perpetuated generation after generation. 5. Is an occasion of sorrowful regret to every lover of the Divine law.

Ver. 34. Rightly they fear him not, because neither truly nor totally. Their religion was *galimfrey*, a mixture of true and false, which is as good as none; for God will not part stakes with the devil at any hand. Such a religion is a mere irreligion, because—1. Contrary to God's law which rejects heathen rites (ver. 34, 36, 37, 38, 40). 2. Contrary to God's covenant, which heathens have nothing to do with (ver. 33, 38). —*Trapp.*

— Decay in religious matters, lack of unity of conviction in the highest and noblest affairs, prevents a nation from ever becoming great and strong. It is a sign of the most radical corruption Similarity of faith and community of worship form a strong uniting force, and are the conditions of true national unity. The existence of different creeds and professions by the side of one another is a source of national weakness. It is an error to try to produce this unity by force: it is a blessing only when it proceeds from a free conviction.—*Lange.*

Ver. 41. Mongrel religion. This base union of fearing God and serving other gods is by no means obsolete. From generation to generation there have been mongrel religionists who have tried to please both God and the devil, and have been on both sides, or on either side, as their interest led them. Some of these wretched blunderers are always hovering around every congregation. I. The nature of this mongrel religion. 1. *These people were not infidels.* Far from it. "They feared the Lord." They did not deny the existence, or the power, or the rights of the great God of Israel, whose name is Jehovah. They had faith, though only enough to produce fear. It was better to dread God than to despise Him; better slavishly to fear than stupidly to forget. 2. *They were willing to be taught.* The man sent to teach them was a Bethelite, one who worshipped God under the symbol of an ox, which the Scripture calls a calf. He was a very slight improvement upon a heathen; but we must be glad even of small mercies. 3. They were willing to learn, *yet they stuck to their old gods.* Thus this mingle-mangle religion left the people practically where they were: whatever their fear might be, their customs and practices remained the same. Have you never met with persons of the same mongrel kind? They take delight in divine services, and yet are much at home with the God of this world. Some worship a deity as horrible as Moloch, whose name in the olden time was Bacchus—the god of the wine cup and the beer barrel. There are others who adore the goddess Venus, the queen of lust and uncleanness. Too often the god is Mammon, who is as degraded a deity as any of them. II. The manner of the growth of this mongrel religion. 1. *These people came to live*

where the people of God had lived. If the Sepharvites had stopped at Sepharvaim they would never have thought of fearing Jehovah; if the men of Babylon had continued to live in Babylon they would have been perfectly satisfied with Bel, or Succoth-Benoth. But when they were brought into Canaan they came under a different order of things. God would not allow them to go the whole length of idolatry in His land. It sometimes happens to utter worldlings that they are dropped into the midst of Christian people. A kind of fashion is set by the professors among whom they dwell, and they fall into it. 2. *The Lord sent lions among them.* Affliction is a wild beast by which God teaches men who act like wild beasts. This is the growth of mongrelists. First, they are among godly people, and they must, therefore, go a little that way; and next, they are afflicted, and they must now go further still. They argue that if the ills they feel do not reform them, they may expect worse. If God begins with lions, what will come next? 3. *Notice that the root of this religion is fear.* Their hearts go after their idols, but to Jehovah they yield nothing but dread. If sin were not followed with inconvenient consequences they would live in it as their element, as fishes swim in the sea. They are only kept under by the hangman's whip or the jailer's keys. They dread God, and this is but a gentler form of hating him. 4. *They had a trimming teacher.* The king of Assyria sent them a priest: he could not have sent them a prophet, but that was what they really wanted. He sent them a Bethelite, not a genuine servant of Jehovah, but one who worships God by means of symbols; and this the Lord had expressly forbidden. I know of no surer way of a people's perishing than by being led by one who does not speak out straight, and honestly denounce evil. If the preacher trims and twists to please all parties, can you expect his people to be honest? Those who are afraid to rebuke sin, or to probe the conscience, will have much to answer for.

III. The value of this mongrel religion. 1. *It must evidently be feeble* on both sides, because the man who serves Succoth-Benoth cannot do it thoroughly if all the while he fears Jehovah; and he who fears Jehovah cannot be sincere if he is worshipping Moloch. The one sucks out the life of the other. The man is lame on both feet, impotent in both directions. He is like the salt which has lost its savour, neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill. 2. *It looked like an improvement.* It had a look in the right direction. They feared the Lord only in a certain sense, but inasmuch as they also served other gods, it came to this, when summed up, that they did not fear God at all. The man who is religious and also immoral, to put it short, is irreligious. The value of this mixture is less than nothing. It is sin with a little varnish upon it. It is enmity to God with a brilliant colouring of formality. 3. These Samaritans in after years *became the bitterest foes of God's people.* Read the Book of Nehemiah, and you will see that the most bitter opponents of that godly man were these mongrels. Their fear of God was such that they wanted to join with the Jews in building the Temple, and when they found that the Jews would not have them, they became their fiercest foes. No people do so much hurt as those who are like Jack-o'-both-sides. The mischief does not begin with the people of God, but with those who are with them, but not of them. As the clinging ivy will eat out the life of a tree around which it climbs, so will these impostors devour the church if they be left to their own devices. 4. *How provoking this adulterated religion must be to God.* It is even provoking to God's ministers to be pestered with men whose hypocrisies weaken the force of his testimony. How provoking must it be to God Himself! True religion suffers for their falsehood.

IV. The continuance of this evil. "As did their fathers, so do they, unto

this day." I am almost obliged to believe in the final perseverance of hypocrites; for, really, when a man once screws himself up to play the double, and both to fear God and serve other gods, he is very apt to stick there. On the anvil of a false profession, Satan hammers out the most hardened of hard hearts.

V. The cure of this dreadful evil of mongrelism. He who in any way tries to serve God and His enemies, is a traitor to God. Suppose God were to treat us after the same double fashion; suppose he smiled to-day and cursed to-morrow. You want one course of conduct from God—mercy, tenderness, gentleness, forgiveness; but if you play fast and loose with Him, what is this but mocking Him? O thou great Father of our spirits, if we poor prodigals return to thee, shall we come driving all the swine in front of us, and bringing all the harlots and citizens of the far country at our heels, and introduce ourselves to thee by saying, "Father, we have sinned, and have come home to be forgiven," and to go on sinning? It were infernal; I can say no less. Lastly, what shall I say of the Holy Spirit? If He does not dwell in our hearts we are lost; there is no hope for us unless He rules within us. None can hang between spiritual death and spiritual life, so as to be partly in one and partly in the other. Be one thing or the other.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

— In time the idolatrous dross got purged out, and eventually the Samaritan system of belief and practice became as pure as that of the Jews, though less exact in some of its observances. In some respects it may have been purer, as the Samaritans would have nothing to do with the mass of oral traditions with which, before the birth of Christ, the Jewish system became disfigured and overladen.—*Kitto.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REIGN OF HEZEKIAH THE GOOD.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Hezekiah the son of Ahaz began to reign**—See Note on chap. xvi. 2 as to the age of Ahaz. Verse 4. **He removed the high places, and brake the images**—His sweeping reformation, by which the land was purged of idols, and the true religion of Jehovah re-established, is more fully depicted in 2 Chron. xxix. **The brazen serpent that Moses had made**—For even that symbol of salvation by faith had become prostituted to idolatrous purposes, just as the symbol of the cross of Christ has become abused in degenerate Christendom. **He called it Nehushtan**—*A thing of brass*, or "the so-called brass god" (Ewald). Verse 7. **He rebelled against the king of Assyria**—Emancipated Judah from the hateful yoke. At this time Shalmaneazer was engaged in war with Tyre; and Hezekiah, acting out his noble faith in Jehovah as his nation's Supreme King, threw off heathenish oppression, and placed himself and people under the Theocracy again. Verses 9-12. **Record of Israel's deportation by Shalmanezer**—Interposed in the story to mark the date of its occurrence in Hezekiah's reign. So that while this good king was restoring *Judah* to alliance with Jehovah, and recovering the independency of the kingdom, the debasing kingdom of *Israel* was falling into ruins. Verse 13. **In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah did Sennacherib, &c.**—*Comp.* Isaiah xxxvi. This mighty Assyrian was with his vast army on his way to war with his hated and dreaded rival, Egypt. Judah lay in the line of his march, and its conquest was essential to his safe advance to Egypt. Hezekiah trembled as this terrible foe swept down upon the land; and being without support from Egypt, he purchased temporary respite by a heavy tribute valuing £351,000, to raise which he had to empty the palace, and even strip the gold from the temple (verse 16). Verse 14. **The king of Assyria to Lachish**—A strongly fortified town south-west of Jerusalem on the way to Egypt. One of the Assyrian bas-reliefs recently discovered represents the seige of a town; shows the figure of an Assyrian king conducting it, and a string of captives whose physiognomy is unmistakably Jewish. Over the head of the king runs this inscription: "*Sennacherib, the mighty king, king of the country of Assyria, sitting on the throne of judgment before the city of Lachish: I give permis-*

sion for its slaughter." Verse 17. **Tartan and Rabsaris . . against Jerusalem**—Sennacherib himself marched forward against Egypt, where he found himself engaged in a three years' campaign, ending in defeat. Tartan was general; Rabsaris, chief of the eunuchs; Rab-shakeh, chief cup-bearer. The general's insolent message to Hezekiah was met with the silence (verse 36) which the king had imposed on his delegates (verse 18), and which the people also maintained. This avoided provocation to the Assyrian general. The ambassadors, grieved at the menacing and insulting language to their king, and the blasphemies against Jehovah to which they had listened, returned to Hezekiah covered with the signs of humiliation and mourning.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-12.

A Resolute Religious Reformer.

I. Is characterised by the possession of a profound and genuine personal piety (ver. 5, 6). The great movements that have blessed the world sprung from the religious spirit. Hezekiah's piety was the actuating force in his reforming work. "He trusted in, he clave to, the Lord": these words reveal the secret of his inspiration and power. We trace the beginning of his religious life to a similar source where many a great and good man received his best and most lasting impressions—the potent influence of a mother's teaching. It is suggestively stated in the text—"His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah" (ver. 2): on which Wordsworth remarks—"The names of the mothers of all the later kings of Judah are mentioned in holy scripture, intimating the importance of a mother's influence, especially in evil days. It needs a brave heart and vigorous hand to attack and reform abuses that have become chronic and popular, and only the man who is sustained by the most intense religious convictions will attempt it.

II. Is fearless and unhesitating in destroying all popular symbols of idolatry (ver. 4). As soon as the king began his reforming work he found there was plenty to do. His kingdom was studded with heathen shrines and idolatrous images. Among the rest was the brazen serpent of Moses, which would acquire a mysterious sanctity because of its antiquity and associations, and would readily be made an object of worship by a people so habituated to idolatry. To the practical eyes of the reformer this object of reverence was but a piece of brass, and he did not hesitate to snap it in pieces. It might seem sacrilege to break up such a relic, but it was idolatry to preserve it; it must share the same fate as the rest. The earnest reformer has a sharp definition in his own mind of what is essential and non-essential, and he makes a clean sweep of whatever balks the attainment of his loved object. He deals in what to him are stern realities. He cannot tolerate shams: away with them!

III. Secures the prospering blessing of Jehovah (ver. 7, 8). God honours the man who is zealous for His glory. So Hezekiah soon realized. He withheld tribute from Assyria, and asserted the freedom and independence of his kingdom. He crushed the Philistines who, encouraged by the weakness of preceding rulers, had harassed the borders of Judah. "He prospered whithersoever he went forth." His kingdom was small; no larger than the triangle in the North of England defined by the towns of Stockton-on-Tees, Whitehaven, and Berwick-on-Tweed—rather smaller than Yorkshire; but it had great natural resources for maintaining a considerable population. (For an interesting description of "Judah in Hezekiah's day," see *Geikie's* "Hours with the Bible"). How so insignificant a territory rose to such importance and affluence under Hezekiah is explained by the recorded fact—"The Lord was with him."

The man that works for God shall not go unblessed; and the most enriching blessing is the Divine Presence. It gives strength to weakness, grandeur to the insignificant, turns defeat into victory, and suffering into joy.

IV. Is stimulated and encouraged in his reforming work by witnessing the disastrous results of apostacy (ver. 9-12). The destruction of the kingdom of Israel was regarded as an event of such significance that the sacred writer interrupts his narrative once more to refer to it, and to reiterate the truth that disobedience was the cause of its ruin. With the example of the fate of the neighbouring kingdom before his eyes, Hezekiah would be excited to fresh zeal in carrying out his reforming work. He saw unless he rooted out idolatry, it would root him out. It is related of a celebrated British ambassador to the Court of Berlin that at one time he possessed a huge boa constrictor, and interested himself in watching its habits. One day the monster escaped from the box where he supposed it was asleep, quietly wound itself around his body, and began gradually to tighten its folds. His position became extremely perilous; but the consummate coolness and self-possession which had enabled him to win many a diplomatic triumph, befriended him in this emergency. He remembered there was a bone in the throat of the serpent which, if he could find and break, he would save himself. He was aware that either he or the snake must perish. Not a moment must be lost in hesitation. He deliberately seized the head of the serpent, thrust his hand down its throat, and smashed the vital bone. The coils were relaxed, the victim fell at his feet, and he was free! So Hezekiah saw his kingdom enswathed in the deadly coils of idolatry, and that unless he acted with promptitude and vigour, both he and his kingdom would perish as Israel had done. He attacked the vulnerable part of the evil with such resolution that he and, for a time his people, were saved.

Lessons:—1. *No man can be a reformer who has not deep religious convictions.* 2. *It is an important advantage when reform is championed by royalty.* 3. *Genuine reform arrests the progress of decay and ruin.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-3. Israel is gone. Judah is left standing; or rather, some few sprigs of those two tribes. So we have seen, in the shredding of some large timber tree, one or two boughs left at the top to hold up the sap. Who can but lament the poor remainders of that languishing kingdom of David! Yet, even now, out of the gleeds of Judah, doth God raise up a glorious light to His forlorn Church; yea, from the wretched loins of Ahaz doth God fetch a holy Hezekiah. It had been hard to conceive the state of Judah worse than it was; neither was it more miserable than sinful, and, in regard of both, desperate. When beyond hope, God revives this dying stock of David, and, out of very ruins, builds up His own house. Good Hezekiah makes amends for his father's impiety, and puts a new life into the heartless remnant of God's people. The wisdom of our good God knows when His aid will be most seasonable, most welcome, which He then loves to give when He finds us left of our hopes. That merciful hand is reserved for a dead lift; then He fails us not.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 3. The conversion of Hezekiah was not due to Isaiah, but to a less famous contemporary. It would seem that the corrupt state of morals and religion, against which the prophets of the age of Uzziah complained, continued into Hezekiah's reign. Suddenly, in the midst of an assembly, in which the king himself was present, there appeared the startling apparition, in the simplicity of his savage nakedness, of the prophet Micah With the sharp, abrupt, piercing cry

peculiar to his manner, he commanded each class to hear him. The people listened with awe to the bitter satire with which the nobles were described as preparing their cannibal feast out of the flesh and bones of the poor. They heard him denounce the unholy compact, then first begun, between the mercenary priests and the traitor prophets (Micah iii). There was a pause when he concluded. It would seem as if for a moment an indignant king and people would rise and crush the audacious seer. But Hezekiah was not a mere tool in the hands of nobles, or priests, or prophets. Micah was left unscathed. And even in the prophet's own life-time—it may be almost immediately after his warning—succeeded the promise of a prosperity before unknown; when the nation should in peace be like the gentle dew, in war like the lion in forest and fold, or like a fierce bull treading down his enemies on the threshing-floor, with horns of iron and hoofs of brass. The wild dirge of Micah had been aimed against the moral evils of the nation. Of any moral reformation the chronicler tells us nothing. But the outward reformation which he describes was doubtless the expression of an inward change also.—*Stanley.*

— **Hezekiah and Luther—a parallel.** 1. *Both had a personal realization of the truth.* 2. *They had a high regard and love for the Divine Word.* 3. *They were distinguished by strong faith.* "Trusted in the Lord God of Israel." 4. *They were men of prayer.* Chap. xix. 15-19. Isa. xxxvii. 6-20. Luther said he could not get on without spending three hours a day in prayer. 5. *They had definite beliefs and convictions.* 6. *They had the courage of their convictions.* Seen in definite and decisive action. Hezekiah attacked the idolatries of his time, and Luther the ecclesiastical corruptions of his day. 7. *They enjoyed the guardian providence of God.* How marvellously did God interfere in both histories. 8. *They witnessed the success of their efforts.* The Lord was with them and prospered them. Which of these traits of character do we possess in our sphere as reformers?—*J. Holmes.*

— **Iconoclast.** The first and second commandments make a full sweep of idolatry. We are not to worship any other god; we are not to worship the true God by the use of representative symbols. Our reformers acted well, and after a scriptural model, when they poured contempt upon the idols of Rome, and made a mockery of her saints, relics, images, masses, and priests. There was a deep meaning in their breaking of crosses and the burning of holy roods. Whenever we see superstition in any shape, we must not flatter the folly; but, according to our ability, act the iconoclast's part and denounce it. First, we shall apportion a share of image-breaking work to *believers;* and secondly, prescribe another form of this same work for *seeking souls.* I. **We have much idol-breaking work for Christians to do.** 1. There is much *idol-breaking to be done in the church of God.* We are all too apt as Christians to place some degree of reliance upon men whom God, in His infinite mercy, raises up to be leaders in the Christian Church. We must get beyond men, or else we shall be very babes in grace. We are not to exalt the pipes, but the fountain head; not the windows, but the sun must we thank for light; not the basket which holds the food, or the lad who brings the loaves and fishes, must we reverence, but the Divine master who blesses and multiplies the bread, and feeds the multitude. Love the ministers of Christ, but fall not into that form of brazen serpent worship which will degrade you into the servants of men. There is too much exaltation of talent and dependence upon education, especially in reference to ministers. On the slabs of stone which mark the burial places of the early Christians in the catacombs of Rome, the inscriptions are nearly all ill-spelt, grammar is forgotten, and orthography violated; a proof that the early Christians who thus commemorated the martyred dead, were many of them uneducated persons; but, for all that, they crushed the wisdom of the

sages, and smote the gods of classic lands. We are not to select our pastors simply because of their talents and acquirements; we must regard their unction, we must look at their call, and see whether the spirit of God is with them. The same may be said of human eloquence. Let the men speak well—the truth ought to be delivered in the best of sentences; but the noblest language ever uttered by man never convinced a soul of sin, or bound up a wounded conscience, or raised a sinner from his death in sin, for oratory is but a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal if the Holy Ghost be not there. 2. Much superstition requires to be broken down in reference to a *rigid adhesion to certain modes of Christian service.* There is a class of persons who object to every holy project for evangelisation, however right and judicious, if it happens to be novel; and they will continue to object till the work has been long in action and has placed itself beyond fear of their opposition or need of their assistance. Fetters are none the less burdensome for being antique. Let the brazen serpent be broken if it become a barrier to the onward progress of the cross. 3. Let us turn to *the temple of our own hearts*, and we shall find much work to be done there. Are you congratulating yourself upon your advanced position? Do you think twenty years' experience has changed your corruptions, that your tendencies to sin are not so strong as they were, that you have less need to watch, less need to depend simply on the merit of Christ and the work of His Spirit? I have heard that more horses fall at the bottom of the hill than anywhere else, and I know that more professors make shipwreck towards the close of life than at any other time. The falls recorded in the Old and New Testaments are the falls, not of young men in the heat of passion, but of old or middle-aged men. Lot was no boy when he disgraced himself. David was no young man when he transgressed with Bathsheba. Peter was no child when he denied his Lord. An old Puritan quaintly says, suppose a loving husband were to give to his wife many rings and jewels out of love to her, and she should come to think so highly of the love tokens that she sat and admired them and forgot her husband, would he not be rather inclined to take these things away to turn her love once again to himself? So with our graces and enjoyments; if we think too much of them, the iconoclastic hammer will come in, and these things will vanish because they have provoked the Lord to jealousy. II. Those who are seekers of Jesus. There is some idol-breaking to be done for them. Many think they ought to be much better than they are; they have faults to be corrected; their minds are in a wrong condition, they must be put right, and they are trying to do this with the intention, when they feel better, to put their trust in Jesus. With some, the Nehushtan which they set up is their sense of sin; either they do not feel the need of Christ as they ought, or else they do feel their need, and therefore think they are in a fair condition. Many are resting in their fear of self-deception. Do you think that your being afraid of presumption is a better thing than believing God's testimony concerning His Son? Many are resting in sermon hearing, or in reading the Bible regularly; others are making an idol of brass out of their prayers. Seekers of Christ continually start new difficulties. Their doubts, reasonings, and questions are like an endless chain: pull up one link, and it brings up another. Their suspicions are like a chain of dredging buckets that come up all full of mire, and over they go and empty themselves but to come up full again. If one-tenth part of the ingenuity they use in rebelling against the command of God, which bids them believe, were used in simply investigating what they are told to believe, they would come to faith and be saved from their doubts. Sinner, let thy artful doubts and reasonings be nailed to yonder tree: crucify them. God grant you grace to break up these idols of yours, and take your Saviour now.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

Verse 4. The preservation of this remarkable relic of antiquity (the brazen serpent) might, like the pot of manna and Aaron's rod, have remained an interesting and instructive monument of the Divine goodness and mercy to the Israelites in the wilderness; and it must have required the exercise of no small courage and resolution to destroy it. But in the progress of degeneracy it had become an object of idolatrous worship; and as the interests of true religion rendered its demolition necessary, Hezekiah, by taking this bold step, consulted both the glory of God and the good of his country. Amongst the numerous hypotheses advanced to account for the origin of this singular reverence, not the least likely is, that it arose from vague and distorted rumours of the miraculous healing of the Israelites in the wilderness; and the image of a serpent became the deified symbol of something good and beneficent. The prevalence of ophiolatry in Egypt, Phœnicia, Syria, and Assyria, could scarcely fail to arrest the attention and impress the minds of the Hebrew people, till in times of ignorance and idolatry they adopted the same superstition; and, although the brazen serpent in the wilderness had no symbolic import, but was merely an external sign, selected, probably, for the general ground of removing all ideas of the natural accomplishment of the cure, yet the tradition concerning the animal, the sight of which had restored the wounded Hebrews, and the reverence felt for it by the neighbouring nations, naturally produced similar sentiments in the minds of the Israelites, till admiration for a venerable relic of antiquity, combined with the contagion of contemporary usages, had, in the degenerate times of the monarchy, gradually led to the worship of the brazen serpent.—*Jamieson.*

Verse 5. The character and life of Hezekiah. I. *His public life.* 1. The spiritual was in his estimation the foundation of the political. 2. Was indebted for his religious training to a pious mother. II. *His great characteristics.* 1. Strong faith in God. 2. Generous ideas. 3. Great zeal in carrying out great movements. 4. Penitent submission under affliction. 5. Vanity which proved fatal.—*H. Kendall.*

Verses 5-8. Religion, the strength of a ruler. 1. When founded in a deep and firm trust in God. 2. Is evidenced by practical obedience. 3. Ensures the mighty help of Jehovah. 4. Enhances the prestige and authority of the throne. 5. Promotes national freedom and prosperity.

Verses 5, 6. True piety. 1. Consists of a faith which is at once trust and confidence (Heb. xi. 1). 2. Clinging to the Lord in adversity and in prosperity without departing from him (Psalm lxxiii. 25). 3. Keeping the commandments of God (James ii. 17; 1 John v. 3).—*Lange.*

Verse 7. Pursuing the policy of a truly theocratic sovereign, he was, through the Divine blessing, which rested on his government, raised to a position of great public and national strength. Besides the revived activity and moral vigour of the people of Judah, connected with the material prosperity of the country, and the religious reforms carried on by Hezekiah, and which, doubtless, was the primary motive that encouraged him to shake off the Assyrian yoke, it is necessary to take into account the secret influence of Egypt upon the councils of the king. Against this, Isaiah all along raised a decided and earnest protest (Isa. xxx. 1-5; xxxi. 1, 3). In counselling Hezekiah, he did not advocate either revolt or submission; he proceeded upon a principle entirely different from that of ordinary politics—that of urging an unwavering faith in the protection of the Divine King and Head of the nation, by an immediate and universal re-establishment of the worship and law of God. This step he recommended to the king as, in the first instance, the most becoming a theocratic ruler, and the most certain of realizing the

fulfilment of the promises made to his people. Acting in this way, the prophet assured him he would find that, with the Divine favour, "one would chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight:" whereas, without help from above, all his military preparations and strategic manœuvres would not secure the deliverance of his kingdom.—*Jamieson.*

Verses 9-12. The fate of nations. 1. Is in the hands of God. 2. The ruin of one nation recorded as a warning to others. 3. The potent cause of national decay and extinction is neglect of God.

— Hoshea and Hezekiah. The former came to the throne by conspiracy and murder, and he did not do what was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he perished with his people. The latter trusted in the Lord and clung to Him, and therefore he came out with his people victoriously from the peril.—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 13-37.

A Boastful and Arrogant Spirit.

I. Is the offspring of military success (verses 13-16). The Assyrian king invaded Judah, captured the fenced cities, compelled Hezekiah to pay a heavy tribute, and now his victorious legions surrounded Jerusalem and threatened it with immediate destruction. Flushed with success and with unlimited confidence in the power of their arms, the captains of the great king indulge in a spirit of proud vaunting. It is the tendency of all military success—especially as war was carried on in those days—to inspire an arrogant and self-confident spirit. Few men know how to behave themselves in the moment of victory. Some soldiers are so elated with triumph, that their bounce and vanity are intolerable. It is forgotten that, in the changing fortunes of warfare, the winners of the fight to-day may be the vanquished of to-morrow.

II. Is plausible in speech and lavish in promises (verses 17-32). There is a sort of cleverness in this speech of Rabshakeh's—the cleverness of craft and guile and flattery. He rallies Hezekiah on his trust in Egypt and in Jehovah, as though they were one and the same in the Assyrian estimation. He promises 2,000 horses if the Jews will come out and fight, though by their inability to find a sufficient number of horsemen he thus shows off the superiority of his attacking forces. He claims to have the authority of Jehovah for his enterprise, and, turning to the people who crowded the city walls, he entices them to submission by promises of peace and plenty. A boastful and arrogant spirit has endless inflexibility; it can adapt itself to anything to gain a purpose. It can hide the most sinister designs under a mask of bewitching plausibility, like certain birds which imitate in their attitudes the forms of the grasses and flowers where they watch for their prey.

III. Hesitates not to insult and defy the only true God (verses 33-35). Rabshakeh boasts that none of the gods of the vanquished nations have been able to deliver their worshippers from the invincible power of the Assyrian arms; and in insulting and defiant terms he charges Jehovah with similar helplessness. But ah! Rabshakeh, thou dost not know the God of the Jews, or thou wouldst not so speak. Thou art carried away with the bombast of pride; and thy mind shaded with the dark screen of idolatrous ideas, thou canst not conceive the superlative greatness and grandeur of Jehovah. Ere long thou shalt be startled with His presence and awed with the ghastly evidences of His desolating power.

IV. Is best treated with dignified silence (verse 36). Silence is what s

proud man least can bear. It irritates and annoys him. He does not know whether you are laughing at him or are afraid of him. And yet what better answer than silence can we give to the threats and coaxings of the arrogant? Euripides was wont to say silence was an answer to a wise man; but we seem to have greater occasion for it in our dealing with fools and unreasonable persons; for men of breeding and sense will be satisfied with reason and fair words.

LESSONS:—1. *Few men can bear with becoming modesty and dignity the power which success brings.* 2. *The flatteries and promises of a boastful man are unworthy of credence.* 3. *Neither threats nor flatteries should seduce us from our trust in Jehovah.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 13-16. Submission. 1. Distasteful to a liberty-loving king. 2. Inevitable in the face of superior force. 3. May prevent or postpone more serious consequences. 4. Often a heavy drain on national resources.

— The gold of faith can only be made to appear through the fires of adversity. If thy faith is not a mere notion, or opinion, or feeling, or sensation, then it will not diminish in time of trial, but grow and become stronger and purer. Whence should we have had David's Psalms, if he had not been tried?

Verses 14-16. Hezekiah held it good policy to make his enemy a golden bridge to go over: so to be rid of him. If Ahaz, that church-robber, had done this, it would better have become him. Hezekiah, for doing it, lost his cost (verse 17).—*Trapp.*

Verses 17-37. Diplomatic rhetoric. 1. Is a dangerous weapon in the hands of an unscrupulous orator. 2. Is often a specious mixture of truth and falsehood. 3. Seeks to weaken allegiance by flattering promises. 4. Awakens grave anxiety with its tone of confidence and power. 5. Sometimes best answered with dignified silence.

Verses 17-35. Rabshakeh, the wolf in sheep's clothing.—I. He appears to warn against Egypt as a power which neither can nor will help, just as Isaiah himself does, while he himself comes to destroy and devour (Matt. vii. 15; 1 Jno. iv. 1). II. He represents what had been ordained by Hezekiah, according to the law of the Lord and for His honour, as a sin and a breach of religion, while he himself cared nothing whatever for the law of the Lord or the true and right worship. Beware of those who represent as weakness and folly that which is Divine wisdom and strength. III. He claims that the Lord is with him, and has commanded to do what he is doing, whereas, in fact, he is only the rod of God's wrath, the staff of His anger, a "hired razor"; and ambition, lust for gold and land, desire for glory and plunder, are his only motives (Matt. vii. 22). Be not deceived by the prosperity and the victory of the godless. They are like chaff which the wind scatters, and their way disappears.—*Lange.*

Verse 17. O lamentable and in sight desperate condition of distressed Jerusalem! Wealth it had none; strength it had but a little; all the country around about was subdued to the Assyrian; that proud victor has begirt the walls of it with an innumerable army, scorning that such a shovelful of earth should stand out but one day. Poor Jerusalem stands alone, blocked up with a world of enemies, helpless, friendless, comfortless, looking for the worst of a hostile fury, when Tartan and Rabsaris, and Rabshakeh, the great captains of the Assyrians, call to a parley. Lord! what insolent blasphemies does that foul mouth of Rabshakeh belch out

against the living God, against His anointed servant!—*Bp. Hall.*

— We can never rely upon the fidelity of a man who is simply bought with money. Want of courage in one's self invites an enemy to arrogance. The more humbly one approaches an enemy, the more insolent he becomes. Peace and quiet which are bought with money have no duration.—*Lange.*

Verse 21. **A false friend compared to the reed of an Egyptian bulrush.** 1. Because though it appears outwardly strong, it is brittle and hollow. 2. Because it fails when we most depend upon it. 3. Because it injures us when we expected it would help us.

Verse 30. "The Lord will deliver us." I. A noble saying in the mouth of a king speaking to his people. He thereby admits that his own power is insufficient and vain. He leads his people in that faith which is a confidence in what is hoped for, and which admits no doubt of what is not seen. How well it would be for all princes and people if they had such faith. II. In this saying, all the hope of the Christian life is expressed. With God we overcome the world, for the Lord will at length deliver us from all evil, and bring us to His heavenly kingdom. The blasphemer and boaster wanted to remove these words of the king from the heart of the people, because he knew he should then have won. Now-a-days, also, these words are laughed at and scorned. Let them not be torn from your heart!—*Lange.*

Verse 36. **Silence.** 1. Is the wisest answer to provocation and threatening. 2. Increases the perplexity of a proud and cruel aggressor. 3. Implies confidence in the help which has been so grossly maligned.

— They punished him with silence, as Isaac did Ishmael. Silence is the best answer to words of scorn and petulency. It is best to stop an open mouth with saying nothing. Princes used to punish the indecencies of ambassadors by denying them audience. Rabshakeh could not be more spited than with no answer. This sulphurous flask therefore died in his own smoke, only leaving a hateful stench behind it.—*Trapp.*

CHAPTER XIX.

JERUSALEM SUPERNATURALLY DELIVERED.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 2. **Sent to the prophet Isaiah**—The prophet, in that Jewish age, was regarded as the messenger and representative of Jehovah. While the *king* was entrusted to witness of the Royalty and Majesty of God, the *prophet* was recognized as the oracle of Divine Wisdom and Truth. Here was a crisis of eminent peril to the nation, in which the people and the Name of Jehovah were alike contemptuously menaced. It was a moment for the *Word* of God to come forth; so Isaiah was sought by the king. Verse 6. **And Isaiah said unto them, Be not afraid**—Terror met by cheerfulness; deliverance assured to Judah, destruction threatened to Assyria. "**The servants of the king of Assyria**" are called contemptuously נַעֲרֵי מֶלֶךְ, "the *young men* of the king," *i. e.*, his boastful and blasphemous generals. The literal fulfilment of these predictions proves so keen a difficulty to modern naturalism (as opposed to the supernatural) that critics are intent on discrediting these verses 6 and 7 as an interpolation. But "the Word of the Lord endureth for ever." Verse 9. **He heard of Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia**—This was the "rumour" (verse 7). The name of Tirhakah, king of Upper Egypt, a monarch of mighty conquests, lingers still in the inscriptions in the Egyptian temple of Medinet Abou. Apprehending the arrival of this Egyptian warrior, the Assyrian king sent Hezekiah a terrifying letter urging immediate surrender. Verse 12. **The children of Eden in Thelasar**—Not the Eden of Amos (i. 5), situate amid the beauties of Lebanon, but the Assyrian Eden mentioned by Ezekiel (xxvii. 33). **Verse 14. Hezekiah spread the letter before the Lord**—This act has been charmingly

described by Delitsch as "a prayer without words, a prayer in action, which then passes into a spoken prayer." Verse 20. Then Isaiah sent to Hezekiah—While the king prayed, the prophet was receiving the answer. The simultaneousness of prayer and answer is emphasized. The message from God through Isaiah is a rhetorical outpouring of scorn upon the Assyrian king's pretensions, followed by direct and withering denunciations, which are sealed by minute prophecies, whose fulfilment should indicate to Hezekiah that the Lord Himself would effect the boastful blasphemer's overthrow. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this" (v. 31). Verse 29. This shall be a sign unto thee—An address to Hezekiah. The sign was that for two years the peaceful labours of husbandry would be impracticable in consequence of the enemy's presence near at hand, but that agriculture would proceed in quiet in the third year, labour being crowned with bounty. Verse 32. Nor come before it with shield—Perhaps an assault, advancing with shield held in front; or, more probably, Not occupy any position before the city defended by a fence or breastworks. None of the processes of seige or war should be permitted against Jerusalem. Rawlinson's readings of the Assyrian slabs discovers extended and minute records of this expedition of Sennacherib, graphically reproducing the Scripture story of events. No account of the catastrophe is there given; the Assyrians only recounted their victories. Verse 35. That night the angel of the Lord went out, &c.—Two years interposed, during which the invasion of the land by Sennacherib went forward. "*That night*" therefore, refers to the ultimate concentration of the Assyrian army upon Jerusalem, with the intention of commencing the seige next day. "*The angel of the Lord*," even as "the destroying angel" (Ex. xiii. 23), went forth against the first born of Egypt: and 185,000 perished. How was this effected? By the scorching simoom, which still destroys entire caravans! or, as Josephus records (*Antiq.* x. i. 5), *τοῦ θεοῦ λοιμικὴν ἐνσκήψαντος αὐτοῦ τῷ στρατῷ νόσον*? "God had sent a pestilential distemper upon his army." Verse 37. Sennacherib slain—His reverses in battle rendered him furious; his rage and tyranny grew intolerable. Judgment fell upon him from the hands of his own sons. And a third son, Esarhaddon, came to the Assyrian throne. Berosus informs us that this *Asordanus* was first viceroy of Babylon, and afterwards eight years king of Assyria.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-37.

The Resources of the Good Man in Time of Trouble.

This was a day of sore trouble to Hezekiah. The veteran hosts of Sennacherib, flushed with victory, invested Jerusalem, and threatened it with destruction. The expected help from Egypt was not forthcoming. The defensive resources of Hezekiah were circumscribed, and it seemed hopeless to offer resistance. He had but one refuge—a refuge the proud Assyrian despised: but it proved all-sufficient in the day of his calamity. The whole chapter is a striking illustration of *the resources of the good man in time of trouble.*

1. He seeks counsel from those who are most competent to advise him. (ver. 1-7). It is not every prince who has an Isaiah at his elbow to advise in difficulty and comfort in distress. God's way of helping in trouble is often in directing us to the best human counsellors. 1. *The good man, like Hezekiah, recognizes the need of Divine intervention* (ver. 1-5). While the supercilious Assyrian trusted in his arms, Hezekiah trusted in his God. There are times when we are reduced to such straits that none but God can help us. No one sees these times with a keener eye than the good man. His common sense teaches him to exhaust all natural, human means, and not to stand wringing his hands in despair, or folding his arms in indifference; but he is aware a point is reached where all he can do is to trust: God must do the rest. It is wise to recognize this. It honours God and saves us from presumption. 2. *The good man, like Hezekiah, recognizes the utility and power of prayer by a true servant of Jehovah.* "Wherefore lift up thy prayer, &c." (ver. 4). The heritage of God's people is a heritage of prayers. It is a strength to us in trouble to know that our own prayers are reinforced and supplemented by the prayers

of others. Every praying agency we can set in operation is a positive gain. Even the prayerless are benefited by the supplications of praying souls on their behalf. We may be receiving blessings to-day in answer to the anxious prayers of parents who are no longer with us. 3. *The good man, like Hezekiah, is encouraged with the promise of Divine help* (ver. 6, 7). The message of Isaiah must have convinced the king of the wisdom of the course he adopted in seeking the advice and help of the prophet. Jehovah will punish the insolence of the blasphemous Assyrian, and deliver the distressed monarch from his fangs. How tenaciously we cling to the most indefinite promise of help when we are in trouble; it is the silvery rift in the cloud, the distant gleam of the squadrons rapidly hurrying to our relief. But with what calm confidence should we rest on the slightest word of the living God!

II. **He is reminded of the nearness and reality of his peril** (ver. 8-13). There are plenty of real dangers in life without unduly harassing ourselves with imaginary ones. If Hezekiah, with the powerful Assyrian forces encircling his only stronghold, had been tempted to regard the peril as but trifling, he would be undeceived when he received the fierce, war-breathing message of Sennacherib. The wildest threats of Rabshakeh were reiterated, and Jehovah again insulted and blasphemed. Well did Hezekiah know the terrible might of the Assyrian arms; and yet, while he trembled, he was undismayed. It is fanaticism to treat danger with indifference. It is to court defeat and ruin.

III. **He resorts to God in earnest prayer** (ver. 14-19). The prayer is short, but it is sublime in its style and comprehensive in its range, and burns throughout with incandescent earnestness. Its salient features are worthy of study. It is a model prayer for a distressed soul. (1) The petitioner acknowledges the supreme Rulership of Jehovah (ver. 15). (2) He traces the ruin of nations to their idolatry (ver. 17, 18). (3) He calls upon Jehovah to vindicate His supreme Lordship by delivering him from the threatened peril (ver. 19). Prayer is the grand refuge of the distressed; it is the passionate outcry of conscious need. The more vividly we realise our peril, the more sincere and earnest will be our prayer. In prayer, says Bunyan, it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart.

IV. **He is assured of a signal answer to his prayer** (ver. 20-34). If there were no answer, it would still be our duty to pray, though without an answer we should be in danger of becoming simply mechanical in our prayers. As by a letter Hezekiah was plunged into deepest grief, so by a letter of a different import shall his heart be made glad. This letter was written in the gorgeous imagery familiar to the gifted Isaiah. It is true a draught of water is as sweet to the thirsty, whether drank from a common earthenware vessel, or from a richly chased goblet; still, the precious fluid may be found in the one vessel as in the other. In this Divinely inspired answer Sennacherib is rebuked for his proud boasting, and his humiliation and retreat predicted; a pledge is given that Judah shall still flourish in peace and prosperity; a solemn announcement is made that Sennacherib shall utterly fail in carrying out his boasted threats; and Jehovah promises himself to defend and deliver the beleagured city. How great is the condescension of our God, in not only hearing prayer, but in assuring the suppliant of an answer—an answer adequate to meet the case, turning fear into confidence, humiliation into triumph, sorrow into joy.

V. **He is privileged to witness a great and miraculous deliverance** (ver. 35-37). One hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians smitten in one night, and Sennacherib murdered by his own sons! Surely Judah is sufficiently

avenged, its insults and suffering atoned, and the word of the blasphemed Jehovah solemnly vindicated. It is probable that the supernatural agent of Divine vengeance made use of a deadly plague or pestilence in the destruction of the Assyrian soldiers. Dr. Kitto contends that a simoom, or hot pestilential wind, was the destroying agent. Whatever the means used, the awful fact that so many perished cannot be explained away. Herodotus refers to it in his history, though in a legendary form, when he relates:—"As the two armies (Egyptian and Assyrian) lay opposite one another, there came in the night a multitude of field mice, which devoured all the quivers and bowstrings of the Assyrians, and ate the thongs by which they managed their shields. Next morning they commenced their flight, and great multitudes fell, as they had no arms with which to defend themselves." Jehovah is not restricted to any one method in punishing his enemies.

LESSONS:—1. *Prayer is the best refuge of the distressed.* 2. *National calamities give anxiety to the true-hearted monarch.* 3. *Sincere prayer is never offered in vain.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. O the noble piety of Hezekiah! Notwithstanding all the straits of the siege and the danger of so powerful an enemy, I find not the garments of this good king any otherwise than whole and unchanged; but now, so soon as blasphemy is uttered against the majesty of his God, though by a pagan dog, his clothes are torn and turned into sackcloth. There can be no better argument of an upright heart than to be more sensible of the indignities offered to God than of our own dangers. The more we see God's name profaned, the more shall we, if we be truly religious, love and honour it.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 2-7: 20-34. Isaiah a sublime example of a great prophet. 1. Was himself unmoved and confident while king and court were perplexed and distressed. 2. His influence and power were fully recognized in the depth of the national crisis. 3. Was familiar with the intentions of Jehovah, and rejoiced in vindicating His character. 4. His predictions were couched in terms of inimitable grace and dignity.

Verses 2-7. A sorrowful embassy. 1. Its external appearance was symbolic of the desperate straits of the nation and its leaders. 2. It was sent to the only man who seemed able to advise in the emergency. 3. It returned with a message that inspired confidence and hope.

Verse 4. Pray to thine utmost, strive and strain, tug hard and bestir thee all that ma be. Prayer is a laborious exercise; and as a man that would be good at lifting must set his sides and shoulders to work, he must also often use himself to lifting, so here. This gets a dexterity, a handiness to the work.—*Trapp.*

Verses 8-13. The arrogance of power. 1. Is fed by military successes. 2. Is exasperated by resistance. 3. Is imperious and blustering in its demands. 4. Refuses to acknowledge any power superior to itself.

Verses 8-19. The two contrasted kings: Sennacherib and Hezekiah—the godless and the just. I. Sennacherib, who sees himself in peril and obliged to retreat by the approach of Tirhakah, does not on that account become more modest and humble, but only more obstinate and arrogant. This is the way with godless and depraved men. In distress and peril, instead of bending their will and yielding to the will of God, they only become more stubborn, insolent,

and assuming. Hezekiah, on the contrary, who was in unprecedented trouble and peril, was thereby drawn into more earnest prayer. He humbled himself under the hand of God, and sought refuge in the Lord alone. II. Sennacherib rejects faith in the God of Israel as folly, and boasts that all the gods of the heathen were powerless before him. He lives without God in the world, and knows no God but himself. He asks, "Where is the God of Hamath?" &c. But where is now Sennacherib, who talked so proudly? He is gone like chaff before the wind, for the way of the godless shall perish. But Hezekiah will not let himself be drawn away from his God. His faith becomes only so much warmer and deeper. He prays, and seeks not his own honour, but that of the Lord, in whom he puts his confidence. The greater the cross, the greater the faith. The palm grows under weight. Sweetness flows from the grape when it is well trodden.—*Lange.*

Ver. 14. A king in trouble. It is evident that Sennacherib did not desire to make peace with Hezekiah. The destruction of Jerusalem would have been of great advantage to the Assyrians; to have left that strong city unsubdued behind them as they advanced towards Egypt would have been impolitic and unsafe. So Sennacherib determined to destroy it, and sent a letter full of boastful arrogance, threats, blasphemy, false insinuations, and insults to its king.

I. Hezekiah's trouble. 1. Kings cannot escape the scorching sparks of trouble that fly in all directions from the burning wheels of life. Palatial walls are often no barrier, and perfumed chambers are no relief. Trouble, like death, enters all dwellings. The higher the station, the greater the liability to woe. Storms howl on mountain tops when sunshine gilds the plain. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." "The lofty pine the great wind often rives." 2. Neither does piety prevent trouble. Hezekiah had manifested the most ardent zeal for the worship of Jehovah. He walked before God in truth and righteousness. And yet this trouble fell upon him. Trouble is not an absolute evil. If it were, the pious would escape it. It is an angel in *dishabille* stooping to serve us. "Celestial benedictions often assume dark disguises." Trouble is a divine factor in human life. "Divine diet," as an old writer phrases it, is as necessary for moral growth and strength as daily food is for our physical natures. Trouble is often a proof of God's interest in us. The best need discipline. The pious are often more benefited by trouble than by joy. 3. Trouble, too, may arise, not from our own wrong-doings, but from the wrong-doings of others. Sennacherib's lawless ambitions then troubled the whole earth. God uses evil men to discipline his saints. Our troubles are shaped by God. He controls them, though they appear wild and formless. Men rage like a storm, but we may be

"Assured that He, who from the tempest's neck
Hath loosed his grasp, still holds it at His beck;
And with a pulse too deep for mortal sense,
The secret pulse of His omnipotence,
That beats through every motion of the storm,
Can check destruction in its wildest form."

The hand that holds these sharp threshing instruments, these pruning knives, these fashioning chisels, is a firm one, and guided by infinite wisdom. God knew what Hezekiah needed. God used Sennacherib to discipline him. 4. Great troubles may be conveyed to us by insignificant means. A *letter* only was received, and yet what a universe of woe there was in it. *Only* a *letter!* But it has crushed a noble spirit, broken a mother's heart, cast a man upon the earth writhing in unutterable anguish, blotted out his life's sun, and driven him forth an exile to wander over a dark and desolate waste for ever. *Only a letter!* But who can tell what troubles the reception of a letter may convey? Postmen often carry social torpedoes in their bags. But, further, what was the trouble which now dis

tressed Hezekiah? 1. *The threatened loss of his kingdom.* Men cling to their possessions. They have an instinct to retain as well as gain. Loss is always painful. To lose his kingdom was to lose his all. 2. *The threatened loss of his position.* None like to be compelled to abdicate, even if his throne be only the chief seat in the synagogue, the vestry hall, the market-place, or the workshop. Men grip high places tenaciously. Dread of social humiliation will blacken life's fairest pictures. Hezekiah saw before him the loss of all his greatness and honour. 3. *Threatened captivity or death.* To grace a conqueror's triumph, to pine away in a dungeon, or to endure a cruel death, would most probably be his lot if he were not delivered from his powerful foe. Little mercy was shown to the conquered in those days. A dark doom stared him in the face. That which men hold most dear—liberty and life—were imperilled. 4 *Possible demolition of the royal city.* Imperial cities have ever been dear to monarchs. The most heartless have wept over their destruction. Jerusalem was dear to every Jew. It was especially so to its kings. Hezekiah had fortified and beautified it. Its threatened destruction would fill him with dismay. 5. *The ruin and exile of his people.* Hezekiah felt deeply for his people's welfare. Under his reign they had enjoyed much peace and prosperity. That they should be exposed to the brutalities of an invading host, their houses and vineyards destroyed, and themselves ultimately carried away captive into a strange land, would overwhelm him with grief. Such a calamity seemed nigh. 6. *The dishonour of Jehovah.* Sennacherib had insulted God, and Hezekiah's pious heart burned with a holy indignation. If Jerusalem were taken, God's holy and beautiful house would be profaned, His glory tarnished, and His worship, which had been lately restored, obliterated from the earth. These were the bitter elements thrown into his chalice of grief. With a heavy heart he wended his way to the house of God, taking the letter with him.

II. Hezekiah's refuge.—All men have not a Divine refuge in trouble. The irreligious cannot rush into the sheltering arms of God. If earthly refuge fails, they are like a ship caught in the tempest without anchor or haven; a warrior exposed to his enemies without shield or fortress; a traveller under the pelting storm without covert or home. Earthly refuges are insufficient in times of extreme peril. Life's insecurities throw us on God. The pious have an advantage over the godless in hours of trial: they can use every means of protection and help which the irreligious have, and then shelter themselves in God. Hezekiah had availed himself of every earthly defence. He had done all that a wise monarch could do to defend his city, and after this, he committed his cause to God. Fanaticism despises means, but true faith uses them, and then soars above them to rest in omnipotence. 1. *Hezekiah sought God in his refuge in the Temple.* He went there because, in that holy place, God more particularly manifested Himself. Special promises were given to those who prayed within its sacred precincts. Hezekiah had often beheld the Divine glory there. It was his accustomed place of worship. His trouble had not driven him there, as trouble often drives one to the sanctuary. He went there because he believed that he would find God most easily in that place. Helpful memories often crowd upon us in places where we have often prayed, and bear us up, as upon eagles' wings, into the Divine presence. Sacred places are often the gate of heaven to the troubled spirit. Men, then, strive to find the quickest way to the sympathetic heart of God. 2. *Hezekiah would set a good example to the nation.* He would lead his people to seek God in that day of trouble. Kings have great influence. Many follow them either to the temples of vice, or to the temples of religion. A king's example is often more potent than a Divine command. 3. *He*

would publicly manifest his confidence in God's power to protect and save. His faith found expression in an act which honoured God and quickened his confidence in Him. It was not under the paralysis of despair, nor from an ostentatious display of formal piety, but from the promptings of a sincere trust in the living God, that Hezekiah "went up into the House of the Lord." Hezekiah spread the letter before the Lord. This was a most significant act —"a prayer in action." It probably was done in solemn silence, words afterwards rising to his lips. He would not reply to this letter, but he would leave it with God to answer it. Many letters might better be left with God than answered. He wished to show how completely he could place his trouble before God. It is not every trouble that can be spread before God. Troubles that come from our follies, or that are the sequences of our sins, and that are the result of our opposition to the will of God, cannot be fully spread "*before the Lord.*" Some reserve is necessary, and this is often fatal to our success in prayer. Hezekiah had nothing to hide: he placed himself and his trouble entirely in the hands of God. This was his refuge, and his deliverance was sure.

LEARN:—1. *To live so as to have those troubles only which come by Divine appointment.* 2. *In the greatest of these troubles never to despair of Divine help, but to expect it.* 3. *To be pious in prosperity, that when adversity comes we may have God for our refuge.*—*Hom. Quarterly.*

— The devout spirit of this prayer, the recognition of the Divine Being in the plenitude of His Majesty—so strikingly contrasted with the fancy of the Assyrians as to His merely local power; his acknowledgment of the conquests obtained over other lands, and of the destruction of their wooden idols, which, according to the Assyrian practice, were committed to the flames, because their tutelary deities were no gods; and the object for which he supplicated the Divine interposition, that all the kingdoms of the earth might know that the Lord was the only God—this was an attitude worthy to be assumed by a pious theocratic king of the chosen people.—*Jamieson.*

Verses 14-19. **A pathetic spectacle.** 1. A monarch pleading for a nation in distress (verse 14). 2. Jehovah reminded of His close relationship to His covenant people (verse 15). 3. A picture of the havoc wrought in a nation by its idolatry (verses 17, 18). 4. A touching appeal to Jehovah to vindicate His character (verse 19).

— Distress and misfortune are the school in which a man learns to pray aright. How many a one repeats prayers every day, and yet never prays aright. Every one knows from his own experience that he has never talked so directly with God as in the time of need. Who is a true man? He who can pray, and who trusts in God.—*Lange.*

Verse 15-19. **A king in prayer.** Prayers have their histories. Their ancestry is trouble, struggle with circumstances, and helplessness. They mark epochs in our lives. They are born in those hours which leave an indelible impression upon us. The sublimest strains which men have uttered have been towards God in moments of agony. A great man's prayers in the anguish of trial lay bare the inner heart of humanity, and should be treasured up as a revelation. "Misery sees miracles." Prayer is a great relief to the troubled heart. To utter our distress is to relieve it. To truly cast it upon God in prayer, is to remove it. Hezekiah sought relief in his trouble in prayer.

I. **Hezekiah prayed to Jehovah as the God of his nation.** O Lord God of Israel. 1. The nation bore the name of one of its progenitors, that "as a prince had prevailed with God." The name Israel had been more generally applied to the northern kingdom of Samaria, which had already been overthrown; but Hezekiah claims it for the remnant that was left. Did he wish to remind himself of Jacob's power in prayer when he uttered that

name? or of God's special interest in his nation? Perhaps both. What God has been to our forefathers, our churches, our nation in times of trouble, He will be to us amid the perils of our day. History is a handmaid in the service of faith. 2. His nation was Jehovah's peculiar dwelling-place—"which dwellest between the cherubims." The Shekinah—the holy light—as a symbol of the Divine presence, ever shone forth from between those weird and colossal figures which Solomon had carved and placed on either side of the mercy-seat. There might be seen a constant manifestation of the presence of God. But Hezekiah's reference to this peculiar Divine manifestation—using words which were probably common among the Jews—was to suggest that as God dwelt among them He would protect His own dwelling-place. God would surely save His chosen habitation. This is true, *God will protect where He dwells.* While He remains, there is perfect safety. When He departs there is ruin. (1). *God dwelling in a nation saves it.* God now manifests Himself, not by a material brightness, but by righteousness, purity, and truth. (2). *God dwelling in a man saves him.* Every Christian is a temple of God. The true cherubim and shekinah are in the soul. (3). *God dwelling in a church saves it.* No enemies can overthrow a church that has the Divine glory shining in the midst of it. (4). We can appeal to the manifestations of the Divine presence to increase our confidence in God in times of danger.

II. Hezekiah recognizes, in his prayer, the sole supremacy of Jehovah. "Thou art the God," &c. 1. Hezekiah asserted that Jehovah was the only true God. Polytheism was a foolish delusion. It probably arose from men's innate propensity to materialize spiritual things, from the worship of natural objects as the manifestation of the Divine power, from the sinful and insatiate imagination of men's hearts, from the deification of departed heroes, or from the attempt to give visible shape to applauded virtues. But there can be but one infinite and eternal God. He may reveal Himself in many ways—in flaming fire, in human forms, in religious truth, in nature, in Christ, in the Spirit—He is one only—infinite, eternal, and incomprehensible—God alone. None can be associated with Him. None can be placed in comparison with Him. All other gods are "no gods." False and dead images, they cannot save themselves from destruction. But Jehovah, the true and living God, could save. 2. That He exercised supreme control over all the kingdoms of the earth. He was not only the God of Israel, but of all nations. Where His power was not acknowledged it was supreme. Where He was not worshipped He reigned, King of all kings, and Lord of all Lords. Hezekiah rested upon God's sovereignty, though it was then obscured. It is often obscured. Evil powers seem triumphant. Anarchy reigns. "High uproar lords it wide." But God's order manifests itself. His purposes unfold themselves. He overrules all dynasties, overthrowing one kingdom and setting up another, curbing the restless might of men, not destroying human freedom, but controlling it. Hezekiah's faith grasped the truth that no earthly power could exist without the permission or surveillance of God. Assyria, as well as Judah, belonged to God.

III. He appealed to Jehovah as the Maker of heaven and earth. Heaven and earth to the Jewish mind included all things. Here was an assertion of universal creatorship. In this sublime idea of God is involved:—1. *That He is eternal.* He existed before all things; delighting in the glory of His own nature before the worlds were made, no material form or spiritual existence sharing that eternity with Him. 2. *That He is separate from His works.* The universe is not He, as the ancient pantheists taught, and as some teach now. He is immanent in all His creatures, but independent of them. The Maker

is not His work. God transcends all beings and worlds. 3. *That He is omnipotent.* He who made the universe must be almighty. Its greatness is inconceivable, and the power that produced it must be infinite. 4. *That He has an absolute right to control all things.* The Maker has indefeasible rights in his productions. This is admitted of men. 5. *That He has all things under His direct control.* As He has created all forces, all laws, all agencies, all worlds, all angels, all men, He has them under His immediate direction, and can turn them whithersoever He will. This conception of God afforded solid ground for Hezekiah's faith. Before the greatness of Jehovah the might of Hezekiah's enemies sank into nothingness. Large conceptions of God will ever give large expectations in prayer. The more we widen our views of God, the more confidence we shall have in Him in trouble.

IV. Hezekiah prayed with great earnestness. "Lord, bow down Thine ear," &c. "Now, therefore, O Lord our God, I *beseech Thee.*" He ardently craves the attention of God. God's knowledge is always perfect, and His interest in His troubled saints always sure; but it sometimes *seems* as if He heeded not. Faith needs testing. Desire must be tried. Hearing and seeing in men are the chief means of observation. The heart in its agonies ever feels the *humanity* of God. Heart cries to heart, deep unto deep, soul to soul. Earnestness is the living spirit in prayer. Our prayers may have order, beauty, and eloquence, but without earnestness they are vain. To desire fervently will lead invariably to ardent expressions. Cold prayers are no prayers. "I beseech Thee" is the natural cry of a praying heart. Earnestness is needed, not to lead God to observe our condition, or to create a disposition in Him to help us, but—1. *That the strength of our desires may be revealed.* 2. *That we may be raised from the low condition of formal devotion.* 3. *That we may have all the spiritual culture which the exteries of real need may impart.* 4. *That we may be prepared to receive Divine deliverance thankfully.* Hezekiah was stirred with the most powerful emotions as he prayed. His trouble heated his soul as fire.

V. Hezekiah recognized the greatness of the deliverance which he sought. "Of a truth, Lord," &c, Other kingdoms had fallen, why not his? Only that his hope was in God. No human ingenuity or might could deliver him. No gods could protect; Jehovah alone must save. Men must be brought to see that deliverance is God's work. The soul is a besieged city. The forces of Diabolus are around Mansoul. The deliverance which it needs is great. Its Sennacherib is mighty. "Of a truth." The whole race has come under his power. We cannot estimate the greatness of our danger. "When Napoleon Buonaparte, watching the fortunes of the battle, saw the charge of our Scots Greys, at Waterloo, as, launched on his columns, they dashed like a thunderbolt into the thick of them, crushing and bearing down all before them, he exclaimed, "How terrible are these Greys!" But what mortal foe so terrible as him we have to fight—so relentless, so malignant, ever walking about seeking whom he may devour! No serpent so cunning, no lion so savage! From other enemies escape may be found; from him, none. Neither the world, nor the Church itself, offers any asylum, nor the universe, other than the hollow of God's hand, the shadow of His wings" (*Guthrie*). To recognize the greatness of the deliverance we need, will—1. *Deepen our sense of helplessness in ourselves.* 2. *Stimulate the exercise of great faith.* 3. *Prepare us for the manifestation of God's great delivering hand.*

VI. Hezekiah associates the glory of Jehovah with the deliverance which he sought. 1. The reproaches which had been cast upon him had been cast upon God. This deliverance would be one of those great

revelations of the true and only God which, in an age when power in the Deity would be more influential than righteousness or love to impress men, would exercise a most potent influence in shaping their spiritual destinies, and, perhaps, set forces at work that for centuries would operate upon men in giving them a deeper reverence for the unseen God, and thus checking their vices and preparing the way for more exalted unfoldings of His character. 2. Hezekiah's prayer prevailed. God's might was put forth; whether, as Kingsley suggests, "by a stream of poisonous vapour, such as often comes forth out of the ground during earthquakes and eruptions of burning mountains, and kills all men and animals that breathe it," or by a pestilence, or by the simoom, or by a plague of mice—according to the Egyptian legend of Herodotus—we cannot tell. But it was God's delivering arm put forth in answer to Hezekiah's faith and prayer—(1) *That his people might learn to put their trust in Him; and* (2) *that all the earth might know that none could defy His power and prosper.*—*Hom. Quarterly.*

Verses 20-34. **Jehovah, the defence of His people.** 1. He vindicates His character from the wicked aspersions of His enemies. 2. He preserves His people inviolate. 3. He delivers them from distress, and restores to them prosperity and power. 4. He is unchanging in His fidelity to His covenant.

Verse 21. There is no more fitting punishment for a proud and arrogant man than to be laughed at and derided, without being able to take revenge. The derision of the daughter, Zion, at the blasphemous boaster, Sennacherib, is not due to sinful malice; it is rather a joyful recognition and a praise of the power and faithfulness of God who reigns in heaven and laughs at those who scoff at Him (Psalm ii. 4; xxxvii. 12, 13).—*Lange.*

Verse 32. Impotent men! What are we in the hands of the Almighty? We purpose, He overrules; we talk of great matters, and think to do wonders, He blows upon our projects and they vanish with ourselves. He that hath set bounds to the sea hath appointed limits to the rage of the proudest enemies; yea, even the devils themselves are confined. Why boast ye yourselves, O ye tyrants, that ye can do mischief? Ye are stinted, and even within those lists is confusion.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 32-34. **Jerusalem, the earthly city of God, a type of the eternal city, the Church of Christ.** If God protected the former, so that no arrow could come into it, how much more will He protect the latter, break in pieces the bows of His enemies, and burn their chariots in fire!—*Lange.*

Verses 35-37. **The proud boaster humbled.** I. He is smitten with dismay by the terrible evidences of a Divine avenging power (verse 35).

Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And the widows of Asshur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

II. He relinquishes in fear and disgrace his proudly-cherished enterprise (verse 36). III. He comes to an untimely and ignominious end (verse 37).

— God's judgments are often delayed for a long time, but then they come all the more suddenly and mightily (Psalm lxxiii. 19). A single night may change the whole face of the matter. Where is now the boaster? Where is the multitude of his chariots? Sennacherib's calamity and his retreat proclaim to all the world that God resisteth the proud; and they are a testimony to the truth of 1 Sam. ii. 6-10. He who had smitten whole kingdoms and peoples, fell under the blows of his own sons. When God has sufficiently chastised His church, He throws the rod of His wrath into the fire (Isaiah xxxiii. 1).—*Lange.*

Verse 37. Sennacherib was the last of the great Assyrian conquerors. No Assyrian host again ever crossed the Jordan. Within a few years from that time, the Assyrian power suddenly vanished from the earth. The effect of the event must have been immense, in proportion to the strain of expectation and apprehension that had preceded it. Isaiah staked upon his prophetic word the existence of his country, his own and his people's faith in God. So literally had that word been fulfilled that he was himself, in after times, regarded as the instrument of the deliverance. There is no direct expression of his triumph at the moment, but it is possible we have his hymn of thanksgiving, when he afterwards heard of the world-renowned murder which struck down the mighty king in the temple at Nineveh. The earth again breathes freely. The sacred cedar-grove feels itself once more secure. The world of shades, the sepulchre of kings, prepares to receive its new inmate (Isa. xiv.) If there is any doubt as to the prophet's utterance, there is none as to the burst of national thanksgiving, as incorporated in the Book of Psalms (Psalms xlvi. lxxvi). The weapons of the great army, such as we see them in the Assyrian monuments—the mighty bow and its lightning arrows, the serried shields—were shattered to pieces. The long array of dead horses; the chariots, now useless, left to be burnt; the trophies carried off from the dead, all rise to view in the recollection of that night. The proud have slept their sleep, and the mighty soldiers fling out their hands in vain. The arms have fallen from their grasp. The neigh of the charger, the rattle of the chariot, are alike hushed in the sleep of death. The wild uproar is over, the whole world is silent, and in that awful stillness the Israelites descend from the heights of Jerusalem, like their ancestors to the shores of the Red Sea, to see the desolation that had been wrought on the earth. As then, they carried away the spoils as trophies. The towers of Jerusalem were brilliant with the shields of the dead. The fame of the fall of Sennacherib's host struck the surrounding nations with terror far and wide. It was like the knell of the great potentates of the world; and in their fall the God of Israel seemed to rise to a higher and yet higher exaltation. The importance of the deliverance was not confined to the country or the times of Hezekiah. It is not without reason, that in the churches of Moscow the exultation over the fall of Sennacherib is still read on the anniversary of the retreat of the French from Russia; or that Arnold, in his lectures on Modern History, in the impressive passage in which he dwells on that great catastrophe, declared that for "the memorable night of frost, in which 20,000 horses perished, and the strength of the French army was utterly broken, he knew of no language so well fitted to describe it as the words in which Isaiah described the advance and destruction of the host of Sennacherib." The grandeur of the deliverance has passed into the likeness of all sudden national escapes.—*Stanley.*

— Thou art avenged, O God, Thou art avenged plentifully of thine enemies! Whoever strives with thee, is sure to gain nothing but loss, but shame, but death, but hell. The Assyrians are slain; Sennacherib is rewarded for his blasphemy; Jerusalem is rescued; Hezekiah rejoices; the nations wonder and tremble.—*Bp. Hall.*

CHAPTER XX.

HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS AND RECOVERY.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **In those days was Hezekiah sick**—The Assyrian invasion occurred in the fourteenth year of his reign (xviii. 13), and now fifteen more years are to be added (xx. 6), making twenty-nine years, the total length of his reign (xviii. 2); therefore this sickness must have occurred the very year of the invasion—"*in those days*"—at which time he was thirty-nine years of age. **Set thine house in order**—Not his domestic affairs, but those of his kingdom, for being without a child, his successor should be selected. Verse 3. **Hezekiah wept sore**—So painful is it to quit life in the very prime of years; but the distress was to him greater because of the fierce menaces of the foe at the gates of his kingdom; and his plans for the religious reformation of the nation were yet incomplete. Verse 4. **Before Isaiah was gone out into the middle court**—*i. e.*, of the royal castle, not of the temple. Verse 6 **Add to thy days fifteen years**—Why fifteen? He was now in the fifteenth year of his reign; God would add an equal period to that he had already enjoyed. He thus stood midway between the beginning and end of his reign. Verse 7. **Take a lump of figs**—The remedy does not determine the precise character of the ailment, for Orientalists apply a poultice of figs to plague boils, and inflammatory ulcers, and carbuncles. But it was so located as certain to prove fatal but for miraculous intervention. Verse 10. **Let the shadow return backward ten degrees**—This miracle has created antagonistic criticism. Either Isaiah, knowing that there would be a partial eclipse of the sun at that time, shrewdly used his knowledge; or else the story of the shadows being deflected is a myth! But the result was possible without any violent derangement of nature—"a phenomenon of refraction in the rays of light" (*Keil*) would effect the sign required. Yet, accepting the miracle in its most supernatural form, the phenomenon was so local and temporary as to carry with it no disturbance of universal nature. Verse 11. **The dial of Ahaz**—מַעֲלוֹת may be interpreted *steps*, for מַעֲלָה means *an ascent*, or *that which ascends*. It can therefore be imagined that some contrivance had been arranged so that the shadow fell on a succession of steps, or slopes, each so measured as to mark the hour of the day. It was of such dimensions, and so conspicuous an object in the court, that Isaiah could point to it, and Hezekiah see it from his sick chamber. Verse 12. **Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon**—This is the first mention of a king of Babylon in Bible history, for hitherto Babylon had only viceroys sent from the Assyrian court. The name "*Merodach*" is that of the Babylonian Mars. He has been variously identified as the Mardo-Cempados of Ptol. Canon, and the Merudach Baldanes of Berosus. Hezekiah's imprudent vanity awakened so much cupidity in these ambassadors as to lead to prolonged intrigues and ultimate conquest by this very power he tried to propitiate. And God was angry with his self-glorying pride. Verse 19. **Good is the word of the Lord**—It signifies, I bow submissive to its justice, resign myself to His will. For the vision of coming ill is softened by the assurance that his own "days" should close in the enjoyment of "peace and truth." God would suspend the execution of His judgment. Verse 20. **Made a pool and a conduit**—The *pond* was formed between the outer and inner walls surrounding the city; and the *aqueduct* conveyed the water from the Upper Gihon, underground, into the city itself, where it flowed into the pool afterwards called Hezekiah's, but now named *Birket el Hammam*.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-11.

LIFE PROLONGED IN ANSWER TO PRAYER.

THE anxiety of the people was now transferred from the nation, so miraculously delivered, to the monarch. Hezekiah was smitten with a fatal sickness—perhaps he had been suffering for some time, and the mental anguish through which he had lately passed would tend to exacerbate the disease. He is startled to be informed that his recovery is hopeless. With cries and tears he pleads for life. He is heard, and fifteen more years are added to his career. A miracle is wrought in confirmation of the Divine promise of recovery. How highly favoured is this man for whom Jehovah so freely exercises his miraculous power! Observe—

I. **That the sudden approach of death fills the stoutest heart with alarm and sorrow.** Death is a painful shock at any time; but, while cherishing the hope of recovery, to be abruptly assured that death is inevitable and at hand, strikes terror into the bravest heart. Hezekiah was utterly prostrate. "With that plaintive tenderness of character which he seems to have inherited from his great ancestor, he could not bear to part with life. He turned his face away from the light of day to the blank wall of his chamber. He broke into a passionate burst of tears. The darkness of the grave was before him, with nothing to cheer him. His tent was struck, his thread of life severed. The cry of a dying lion, the plaintive murmur of a wounded dove, were the only sounds that could be heard from the sick chamber. There seemed no hope of recovery" (*Stanley's* Paraphrase of Isaiah xxxviii.)

> Sooner or later all things pass away
> And are no more. The beggar and the king
> With equal steps tread forward to their end. *Southerne.*

II. **That there are circumstances in which prayer for continued life is justifiable.** Hezekiah was in the prime of life, and with, to all natural appearances, years of useful labour before him. He had succeeded to the throne in a time of national decay, and his spirited reforms had done much to restore the national prestige. He had been rescued from great troubles, and was now in a position to look forward hopefully to a period of rest, peace, and prosperity. He was eager to do more than ever he had done for his beloved country. When, therefore, he is brought unexpectedly face to face with death, we cannot wonder that he should ask for life. Life is sweet; with all its burdens and cares, it has its enjoyments. It is a positive luxury to *live*. And when the powers of life are sacredly devoted to promoting the good of others, we cannot but yearn for the opportunity which continued life affords. But when wrongs have to be righted and faults rectified, how necessary and precious does life then become. Zimmerman remarks, "There appears to exist a greater desire to live long than to live well. Measure by man's desires, he cannot live long enough; measure by his good deeds, and he has not lived long enough; measure by his evil deeds, and he has lived too long."

III. **That life and death are absolutely in the Divine disposal.** 1. *The best natural remedies are futile without the Divine blessing.* The poultice of figs would have had no efficacy if the Lord of life had refused to interfere. Hezekiah knew this well, and he appeals immediately and directly, not to the physician, but to God. In His hands are the issues of life, and on Him they depend for their continuous outflow. "Every one," says a certain writer, "is willing to allow that he received his life originally from the Almighty, and that the Almighty takes it away from him when He pleases. Few, however, are willing to regard themselves as existing only by virtue of His constant influx, the only way in which it can be true that in Him we live and move and have our being." It is our duty to do all in our power to prolong life; but our best efforts must ever be in subordination to the will of God. 2. *The Lord condescends to confirm the faith of His servants by the exercise of miraculous power.* The transition to life was to Hezekiah as sudden and unexpected as the prospect of death. To possess what a few moments before he despaired about, seemed incredible: it was too good to be true. His faith staggered, and he asked for a sign. The shadow of the dial, visible from the window of the king's palace, was put back ten degrees, probably by refraction—none the less a Divine act—and Hezekiah could no longer doubt. He recovered at once, and in three days passed up the steps in royal procession to the Temple to offer thanks and praise to the Lord and Giver of Life. How slow we are to believe, and how painstaking and patient is our gracious Father in encouraging us to trust Him!

LESSONS:—1. *A time of sickness is a time for special prayer.* 2. *God has a profound interest in the sufferings and sorrows of His people.* 3. *Restored health should be used in increased devotion to the service of God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1 and verse 5. "Thou shalt die, and not live." "I will heal thee." **The two messages.** 1. How different their import—the one announcing death, the other promising life. 2. How different their effects—the one creating sorrow, the other joy. 3. Both emanating from the same authority. 4. Both demanding undoubted faith.

Verse 1. **As it is wise, in time of** health and strength, to set one's house in order in a worldly sense—*i.e.*, to make one's will and arrange one's affairs—so is it still more wise to set one's house in order in a spiritual sense, and not to put off making one's peace with God until one stands on the brink of the grave.—*Lange.*

Verse 3. **Conspicuous piety.** 1. Gives no immunity from sickness or death. 2. Is often severely tested. 3. Should guard against self-righteous boasting. 4. Leads the troubled soul to God.

— The course of Hezekiah's thoughts was evidently directed to the promise made to David and his successors on the throne (1 Kings viii. 25). He had kept the conditions as faithfully as human infirmity admitted, and as he had been all along free from any of those great crimes by which, through the judgment of God, human life was often suddenly cut short, his great grief might arise partly from the love of life and the promise of long life and temporal prosperity made to the pious and godly, which would not be fulfilled to him if he were cut off in the midst of his days; partly from the obscurity of the Mosaic dispensation, where life and immortality had not been fully brought to light; and partly from his plans for the reformation of his kingdom being frustrated by his death, and from his having as yet, which was most probably the case, no son whom he could leave heir to his work and his throne. He pleaded the fulfilment of the promise. *Jamieson.*

— Death is dreadful in his best looks, as is the lion, though his teeth and claws be beaten out; or as a hawk to the partridge; or as a serpent's skin, though but stuffed with straw. But why should a saint be fond of life or afraid of death, since to him it is but as his Father's horse to carry him to his Father's house, or as Joseph's chariot rattling with its wheels to carry old Jacob to his son Joseph, so him to Christ?—*Trapp.*

Verse 6. **A fixed time to live.** 1. A doubtful advantage, apt to keep the shadow of the grave ever in view. 3. Should be a constant reminder of the circumstances under which the period was fixed. 4. Is best spent in earnest, religious work.

Verse 9. **Human life a dial.** 1. On which time flings its shadow. 2. It has its morning. 3. Noon. 4. Evening. 5. A Divine hand regulates the time-shadow.

Verse 11. **Time, and how to measure it.** The dial was made to measure time. Every line has a meaning; minutes and hours are numbered, and all scientifically combined, so as to tell the time of day. The Bible is God's dial, by which we have to measure life. Every page has a meaning—a purpose—and its lines of doctrine radiate from Christ as the centre through the whole circumference and circumflex of every-day life. To the uninitiated eye the lines on the dial have no meaning; to the mind of the unenlightened and unbelieving the Bible has no spiritual value, for "the

natural man knoweth not the things that are spiritual, because they are spiritually discerned." But the dial may help us to understand this word, and serve as a foil to throw up in relief, doctrine, precept, promise, prospect. I. *The dial must be so placed as to receive the rays of the sun.* Every line will then come into use. The indicator concentrates the light; the angle of incidence falls within the shadow, marking off the numbers as the earth travels round the sun, and tells the time. The Bible is a system of revealed truth. Outspread before us in type and form, it invites attention. But without the light of the Sun of Righteousness it will only be as a sealed book. The Holy Spirit must shine on its pages before we can read it so as to measure life. Christ crucified, Christ our righteousness, and Christ our life, are set forth in the Bible so as to "make us wise unto salvation." God in Providence, and grace in the heart, are also in this Book. "The hairs of your head are all numbered," said Jesus. A sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His Father's knowledge and permission, and all the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. But the Bible is our guide. We must place it in the sunlight of His Spirit, and not let it lie on the shelf until you may write "Death," "Judgment," "Eternity," on the dust of its boards. II. *The dial of Ahaz was a public instrument intended for all the people of Jerusalem.* Like some of the dials in Egypt at the present day, it was the only means whereby the common people could regulate their daily duty. All would not see it at once, but those who consulted it could tell others the hour by number and by voice. In that land of sunny skies the dial was of daily value and of daily use. The Bible is for all. There was a period in the history of England when it was a rare and costly book, and a time when the "King's Book" and "Bishop's Book," as it was called, were used and set up on the churches, but not allowed to the laity and the common people. It was even chained up to the desk in the crypt of St. Paul's. But after the Reformation, and the right of private judgment was affirmed, it became public property, and is now the cheapest book in the land. An Eastern princess once sent an ambassador to the English Court, to ask of our Queen what was the secret of England's greatness. There is a picture representing a scene in which Queen Victoria is seen standing by the side of the late Prince Consort, and surrounded by ministers of State, presenting the Ambassador with an elegantly bound Bible, saying, Tell your royal mistress that *this is the secret of England's greatness.* Let us cling to this Bible as our birthright. Take what you can get from the pulpit, but let those who cannot or will not come to hear, have the "Book and its story" taken to them. There must be some knowledge before there can be any faith. The Book is for all; see then that, like the Bereans, you "search the Scriptures," for because of this they were more noble than the Christians of Thessalonica, who took for granted that which they ought to have proved.

III. *Clouds would sometimes obscure the sun, and then the dial of Ahaz was in shadow.* Time could not then be measured, but past experience on judging of light would keep faith steady, and work would still be done. In this cloudy land of ours the dial is often in the shade, but the sun is always in its place, and his light is precious. Clouds sometimes come between the mind and God's Book. But the Sun of Righteousness never sets; and there is a silver lining in the darkest cloud of the Christian's experience. Some time since Mr. Glaisher went up in his balloon to measure the atmosphere and analyze it; and just as he was looking down and admiring the glorious landscape outspread below, a cloud overshadowed him, and all was dark as night. But rising higher and higher, the huge machine got into sunshine again, and looking up, the big sun himself was seen pouring down his golden rays, making the dark cloud white and wavy, like a sea of fleecy down. He was in a new

world. So with the believer. In the darkest hour he may be rising higher and higher, until the cloud is pierced, and in the smile of his Father's love he enjoys his life again. Clouds, too, will come when we seek to solve by reason doubts and difficulties that can only be solved by faith. But the sailor is not to throw his lead line overboard because it will not fathom the depths of the Indian Ocean, nor his chart because he sees no lines of latitude and longitude on the sea. If the line is long enough to enable him to take such soundings as will show where there is danger, and the chart such as may be relied upon by experience, he needs no more to ensure safe navigation. Just so with the Christian mariner. He has faculties, but they are limited—they cannot fathom the mind of God, but they are sufficient to discover danger, while the Bible is a chart by which he can safely work his course, and in due time reach the desired haven.

IV. *The sun went backward, and not forward on the dial of Ahaz*, as a sign to King Hezekiah that he would get well again. This was simply a miracle. With God all things are possible, and there we must leave it. In the moral world the law of progress appears to be sometimes in abeyance, and the dial plate indicates a down-going sun. But although at present there are signs which indicate a return to the days of darkness, let us not be alarmed, for God hath said, "At evening time it will be light." Standing on the sea shore, you have seen the back-going wave running out and tearing away the landmarks of its former progress; but look again, it is getting strength as it rises, and, gathering itself like a giant, comes roaring forward to make a higher margin than it left before. So will it be with our tide of Christian progress. It is, perhaps, in the back-going wave at present, but when the Church, like Hezekiah, rises from the bed of sickness, or it may be indifference, the Sun of Righteousness will again appear—the tide of progress will flow onwards, and the world shall yet be brought to the rule of Christ.—*C. W. P.*

— O God, thou wilt rather alter the course of heaven and earth, than the faith of thy children shall sink for want of support.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 12-21.

The Peril of Riches.

I. That the possession of riches is a grave responsibility. Some writers suppose this Babylonian embassy visited Jerusalem *before* the second invasion of Sennacherib, and therefore before Hezekiah's treasury had been drained by the heavy tribute demanded by the Assyrian. Those who accept the order of events as here recorded, argue that Hezekiah had much private treasure left, that he was enriched by the magnificent presents brought to him by other nations who came to congratulate him on his recovery, and that he gathered great spoils from the smitten Assyrian army. The riches were there, and it remained to be seen how Hezekiah would act concerning them. Wealth brings its own cares and anxieties. It puts into the hands of its owner a great power which may be wielded for good or evil. The rich man is but the steward of his possessions, and is accountable to the Absolute Proprietor of all things.

II. That riches may become a snare to the truly good. It seemed unlikely that the man who had just been snatched from the jaws of death should attach any importance to the perishable trifles of earth. And yet the glitter of gold has debauched the holiest. The rich are apt to depend more upon their riches than upon God. It is no sin to be rich; but we must be prepared

to find that the snares of life are increased with the increase of wealth. Says old Chaucer—"In getting and using riches ye should always have three things in your heart: our Lord God, conscience, and a good name." The most wakeful diligence is imperative if we would counteract the temptations of wealth. Riches will sometimes work great mischief, and then leave us helplessly struggling. "For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle towards heaven."

III. **That the ostentatious display of riches often leads to disastrous results.** The Babylonian visitors, who came professedly to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery, to inquire into the extraordinary astronomical phenomenon of the sun dial, and to institute an alliance with Judah, carefully observed this accumulation of treasure, and the weak point of the king in his vain display. This would be reported in Babylon, and was remembered in after years to the utter ruin of Judah. This ostentation is the worst we can read about Hezekiah, and we should not be too severe in judging and condemning him after the Christian standard of the 19th century. The simplicity with which he answered Isaiah (verse 15) reveals an openness and frankness of disposition we cannot but admire. There are men to-day, surrounded with Christian light and influence, who give way to contemptible varieties of display. They are not unnoticed; and there are those who know how to deal with such. It is said that when the upper part of the steeple of the Church of St. Bride, Fleet Street, built by Sir Christopher Wren, was rebuilt in 1764, it was discovered that an old hawk had inhabited the two upper circles, the open arcades of which were filled with masses of birds' bones, chiefly those of the City pigeons, upon which he had preyed. And there are wily hawks of society who are ever ready to prey with merciless and ingenious greed upon the simple and unsuspecting. The discovery of such is all the more difficult when they make the Church of Christ their hiding-place; and the clean-picked relics of their victims are all the more painful to contemplate when one finds the work of plunder has been carried on under the sacred garb of religion.

LESSONS:—1. *Great riches are liable to great changes.* 2. *Riches are not to be selfishly hoarded, or vainly displayed, but wisely used.* 3. *The best of characters may be spoiled by riches.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 12, 17, 18. A future enemy. 1. May be introduced in the guise and with the professions of friendship. 2. Is quick to detect the vulnerable point of attack. 3. May be the instrument of accomplishing the Divine threatenings.

Verses 12, 13. Hezekiah and the ambassadors, or vainglory rebuked. A man with a worn and stained garment may walk without spoiling his robe, where another, clothed in white, might not venture; a spot might not show upon a filthy garment, but the cleaner the robe the more readily is the spot discovered; and from the very fact that Hezekiah was so superlatively a holy man and a man favoured of God, his sin showed itself, and God visited it at once with chastisement. I. To bring out what Hezekiah's offence was, it will be best to begin by describing his circumstances and state at the time of the transaction. 1. *He had received very singular favours.* Sennacherib had invaded the land with a host reckoned to be invincible; but when he came near Jerusalem, he was not able even so much as to cast a mound against it, or to shoot an arrow at it, for God singularly interposed, and the host of Sennacherib, smitten by the sudden

breath of pestilence, or by the deadly air of the simoon, fell dead upon the plain. He had been granted a singular escape from the gates of death; where another man must have died, he was enabled within three days to go up to the house of the Lord. Added to all this in connection with his recovery, God had seen fit to do for him what He had only done for Joshua before, namely, to interrupt the orders of the heavens, and to make the sun go back ten degrees upon the dial of Ahaz as a token by which the servant's faith might be comforted.

In addition to all this, the Lord gave Hezekiah an unusual run of prosperity. Everything prospered. Many serpents lurk among the flowers of prosperity; high places are dangerous places; it was not easy to carry a full cup with a steady hand; a loaded waggon needs a strong axle, and a well-fed steed requires a tight rein. 2. Hezekiah, at this time, *had become singularly conspicuous* The world's mouth was full of Hezekiah. What a temptation is this! When many eyes are upon one, they may, unless grace prevent, act like the eyes of the fabled basilisk which fascinated their prey. A full sail needs much ballast, or the vessel will be overturned. Much grace was needed in the case before us, but this the king did not seek as he should have done. 3. *Hezekiah had remarkable opportunities for usefulness.* Why, Hezekiah, hadst thou been in thy right senses, and had grace kept thy wits about thee, what a sermon thou mightst have preached, with death beneath thee and heaven above thee for the text, and the eternal power and Godhead for the theme! He ought to have made the courts of princes ring with the name of Jehovah. He should have placed himself in the rear of the picture, and have filled the earth with his testimony to the glory of his God. 4. He, above all men, *was under obligation to have loved his God, and to have devoted himself wholly to Him.* Unto God be the glory of our life, though it be but given to us once; but oh! with what emphasis should God have all the glory of it if it be given to us twice! But it is written of him in the Chronicles, "that he rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for *his heart was lifted up.* He enjoyed the blessings, but bowed not before the Giver; he remembered the fruit, but he forgot the tree; he drank of the stream, but did not enough regard the fountain; his fields were watered with dew, but he was not sufficiently grateful to the heaven from which the dew distils. He stole the fuel from the altar of love, and burned it upon the hearth of pride. 5. It appears that *at this time God left his servant, in a measure, to try him.* "Howbeit, in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." It was said by the old masters of metaphors that in the soundest pomegranate there are always some rotten seeds, and the whitest swan has a black bill; to which we may add, there are worms under the greenest turf, and dead men's carcases at the bottom of the calmest seas. In the best Christian there is enough of sin to make him the worst of transgressors if God should leave him.

II. We must now consider the occurrence itself and the sin which arose out of it. 1. It is evident from the passage in Isaiah xxxix. that *he was greatly delighted with their company.* It is said, "Hezekiah was glad of them." In this chapter it is said, "He hearkened unto them." He was very pleased to see them. It is an ill sign when a Christian takes great solace in the company of the worldling, more especially when that worldling is profane. Courtesy is due from the Christian to all men, but the unholy intimacy which allows a believer to receive an unregenerate person as his bosom friend is a sin. 2. The next sin which he committed was that *he evidently leaned to their alliance.* Now Hezekiah was the king of a little territory, almost as in-

significant as a German principality, and his true strength would have been to have leaned upon his God, and to have made no show whatever of military power. It was by God that he had been defended; why should not he still rest upon the invisible Jehovah? But no, he thinks: "If I could associate with the Babylonians, they are a rising people, it will be well for me." It was this getting away from God, this ceasing to walk by faith, this wanting to depend in a carnal manner upon the king of Babylon, which provoked the Lord to anger. 3. The next sin was, *his unholy silence concerning his God.* He does not appear to have said a word to them about Jehovah. Would it have been polite? Etiquette, now-a-days, often demands of a Christian that he should not intrude his religion upon company. Out on such etiquette! Some one once complained of Mr. Rowland Hill that he was too earnest, and he told them in reply the following story. When walking at Woolten-under-Edge, he saw part of a chalk-pit fall in upon some men. "So," said he, "I ran into the village, crying, 'Help! help! help!' and nobody said, 'Dear me, how excited the old gentleman is; he is much too earnest.' Why," said he, "and when I see a soul perishing, am I not to cry 'help!' and be in earnest? Surely, souls are yet more to be cared for than bodies." 4. Meanwhile, mark that Hezekiah sadly made up for his silence about his God by *loudly boasting about himself.* If he had little to say of his God, he had much to say of his spices, his armour, and his gold and silver; and I daresay he took them to see the conduit and the pool which he had made, and the various other wonders of engineering which he had carried out. 5. Surely, also, his sin lay in his *putting himself on a level with these Babylonians.* Suppose he had gone to see *them*, what would they have shown him? Why, they would have shown him *their* spicery, *their* armoury, *their* gold and *their* silver. Now, they come to see him, and he is a worshipper of the invisible God, and he glories in just the same treasures as those in which they also trusted. When a Christian man constantly acts like a worldly man, can it be possible that he is acting rightly? If they say, "Here are my treasures," let us tell them about the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," and say, "Our treasure is above." Let us imitate the noble Roman lady, who, when her friend showed her all her trinkets, waited till her two fair boys came home from school, and then pointed to them, and said, "These are my jewels."

III. The punishment and the pardon. We may generally find a man's sin written in his punishment. We sow the thorns, and then God flogs us with them. Moreover, he threatened to make the same persons the means of his punishment who had been the means of his sin. "You were so pleased while you showed these Babylonians your treasures; these very ones shall take them away." And so the things in which we confide shall be our disappointment; if we take our hearts away from God and give them to any earthly thing, that earthly thing will be a curse to us. Our sins are the mothers of our sorrows. Judgments being therefore threatened, Hezekiah and the people humbled themselves. The child that bares his back to the rod shall not be very hardly smitten. Submission more easily averts blows from God's hand than anything else.

Yet though God did forget the sin and promise to remove the punishment from Hezekiah, yet He did not avert the consequences from another generation. So with us. You let loose the river, and it will flow on for ever. The action of to-day will affect all time; more or less remotely it will affect every coming age, for you tell on another man, and that other man on another, and even eternity itself shall hear the echo trembling along its halls of yon momentary action, which you, perhaps, without thought, committed against the living God.

IV. I have now to gather up the lessons of this narrative. 1. *See,*

then, what is in every man's heart. This was in Hezekiah's heart—he was one of the best of men; the same is in your heart. You are humble to-day; you will be proud as Satan to-morrow if left by God's grace. Perhaps it is not possible for any one of us to know our full capacity for guilt. Only let the restraining hand of providence and grace be taken away, and the wisest of us might become a very madman with the rage of sin. 3. *Tremble at anything that is likely to bring out this evil of your heart.* Above all, be afraid of prosperity; be thankful, but do not be over-enjoyed; walk humbly with your God. A pirate very seldom attacks a ship that is going unloaded; it is the vessel that is well stored that the buccaneer will seek to gain, and so with you: when God loads you with mercy, the devil will try to take you if he can. Riches and worldly company are the two cankers that eat out the very life of godliness. 3. We should be taught *to cry out every day against vainglory.* Do not you believe there may be as much pride in rags as in an alderman's gown? Is it not just possible for a man to be proud in a dustcart, as if he rode in her Majesty's chariot? A man may be just as proud with half a yard of ground, as Alexander with all his kingdoms, and may be just as lifted up with a few pence as Crœsus with all his treasure. Pride will grow on a dunghill, as well as in the king's garden. 4. And then, supposing that you should have given way to it, *see the sorrow which it will bring you; and if you would escape that sorrow, imitate Hezekiah, and humble yourself.* When God is wrestling with man's pride, let the man struggle as he will, he will throw him; but when the man is down, God lifts him up. None so ready to lift up a fallen foe as our God. 5. Lastly, *let us cry to God never to leave us.* Lord, keep me everywhere. Keep me in the valley, that I murmur not of my low estate! Keep me on the mountain, that I wax not giddy through pride at my being lifted up so high! Keep me in my youth, when my passions are strong! Keep me in my old age, when I am conceited of my wisdom, and may therefore be a greater fool than even the young. Keep me living, keep me dying, keep me labouring, keep me suffering, keep me fighting, keep me resting, keep me everywhere, for everywhere I need Thee, O my God. —*C. H. Spurgeon.*

Ver. 13-18. **A spirit of ostentation.** 1. May mar a character otherwise commendable. 2. Excites the cupidity of the designing. 3. Should be rebuked by the faithful minister. 4. Leads to ruinous consequences.

Ver. 13. The display was wrong as making a vain exhibition, for his own aggrandisement, of what had been offered him from reverence and respect to his God, and at the same time presenting a bait for the cupidity of these rapacious foreigners who, at no distant period, would return from the same city of Babylon and pillage his country, and transfer all the possessions he ostentatiously displayed, to Babylon, as well as his posterity, to be court attendants in that country. Besides, it was wrong in a higher point of view, as all alliances with foreign or heathen states were at variance with the fundamental principle of the theocratic kingdom of Judah. This passage affords a strong argument as to the prophecy respecting the captivity to Babylon, showing that the words must have been spoken very long before the event. The folly of the king and the reproof of the prophet must stand or fall together; the one prompts the other; the truth of the one sustains the truth of the other; the date of the one fixes the date of the other. Thus the period of Hezekiah's display of his finances being determined to a period soon after the downfall of the Assyrians, this rebuke of the prophet, which springs out of it, is determined to the same. Then the rebuke was a prophecy; for as yet it remained for Esarhaddon, the son of Sennacherib, to annex Babylon to Assyria by conquest; it remained for the two kingdoms to continue united for two generations

more; it remained for Nabopolassar, the satrap of Babylon, to revolt from Assyria and set up that kingdom for itself; and it remained for Nebuchadnezzar his son to succeed him, and, by carrying away the Jews to Babylon, accomplish the words of Isaiah. But this interval occupied a hundred years and upwards; and so far, therefore, must the spirit of prophecy have carried him forward into futurity, and that, too, contrary to all present appearances. For Babylon was as yet but a name to the people of Jerusalem; it was a far country, and was to be swallowed up in the great Assyrian Empire, and recover its independence once more, before it could be brought to act against Judah.—*Jamieson.*

— How easily have we seen those holy men miscarried by prosperity, against whom no miseries could prevail. He that stood out stoutly against all the Assyrian onsets, clinging the faster to his God, by how much he was harder assaulted by Sennacherib, melted now with these Babylonian favours, and runs abroad into offensive weaknesses.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 15. O Hezekiah! what means this impotent ambition? It is not long since thou tearedst off the very plates of the Temple doors, to give unto Sennacherib; and can thy treasures be suddenly so multiplied, that they can be so worthy to astonish foreign beholders? or, if thy storehouse were as rich as the earth, can thy heart be so vain as to be lifted up with these heavy metals? Didst thou not see, that heaven itself was at thy beck, whilst thou wert humbled? and shall a little earthly dross have power over thy soul? Can the flattering applause of strangers let thee loose into a proud joy, whom the late message of God's prophet resolved into tears? O God! if thou do not keep us, as well in our sunshine as in our storm, we are sure to perish; as in all time of our tribulation, so in all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us! —*Ibid.*

— We still show our spiritual treasures to the friends from Babylon, especially when we admire our own gifts, and like to have others admire them. As soon as strangers arrive we hasten to show our gifts, and powers, and accomplishments, in order to win respect. This is just the way to lose all those things. If one collects treasures, let him store them up in heaven, where no spies will come to see them.—*Lange.*

Ver. 19. **A submissive spirit.** 1. Acknowledges the righteousness of the Divine procedure. 2. Is thankful for the gracious suspension of the Divine judgment. 3. Cannot but regret the sufferings that must fall upon its descendants.

— This rod was smart, yet good Hezekiah kisses it: his heart struck him no less, than the mouth of the prophet; meekly, therefore, doth he yield to this Divine correction. "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken." I have deserved a present payment; O God! thou deferrest it. I have deserved war and tumult; thou favourest me with peace. I have deserved to be overrun with superstition and idolatry; thou blessest me with truth. Shouldst thou continue truth unto me, though upon the most unquiet terms, the blessing were too good for me; but now thou hast promised, and wilt not reverse it, that both truth and peace shall be in my days. God's children are neither waspish nor sullen when they are chid or beaten, but patiently hold their backs to the stripes of a displeased mercy.—*Bp. Hall.*

— The hopes of Hezekiah, as we have seen, were entirely confined within the limits of this life. None of the Jewish kings had a keener sense of the grandeur of his mission; but to none was it so closely identified with the interests of the present. The fifteen years of the remainder of his life seemed to be so much rescued from the desolation of impending calamities. When his end at last came, his funeral was marked with unusual honour. The whole population of the city and of the royal tribe of Judah were present. His burial forms a marked epoch in the royal

interments. It may be that David's catacomb was filled. Hezekiah is the first king who was buried outside the city of David. Apparently his tomb was on the road approaching to the ancient burial-place of his family, and from this time no prince of the royal house was interred within the walls.—*Stanley.*

CHAPTER XXI.

MANASSEH: THE REIGN OF TERROR IN JERUSALEM.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **Manasseh was twelve years old, &c.**—Born, therefore, three years after his father's recovery. His reign was the longest of any king in either kingdom. Verse 2. **He did evil . . after the abominations of the heathen**—His minority was passed under Court influences wholly alien from Hezekiah's aspirations; for there was a powerful party in the realm who revolted in heart from all the religious reforms which king Hezekiah introduced into the kingdom; "*scornful men*, who ruled the people in Jerusalem" (Isa. xxviii. 14); "*rebellious and lying* children, that would not hear the word of the Lord" (Isa. xxx. 9-12). Verse 3. **Altars for Baal, and made a grove**—*i. e.*, an *image of Astarte.* Ahab introduced these idolatries into Israel (*see* xvi. 3, 4). **And worshipped all the hosts of heaven** (*comp.* Notes on xvii. 16)—From this worship of the heavenly bodies—sun, moon, planets, zodiacal constellations (*cup.* xxiii. 5)—arose the Chaldean system of *astrology;* and this being introduced among the people, led to the multiplication of astrologers, soothsayers, and magicians; and these became the nation's oracle in place of Jehovah. Verse 5. **Altars for all the hosts of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord**—This was the most advanced stage of profanation which had yet been reached. "Iniquity added unto iniquity:" impiety becomes more blasphemous as it proceeds. Verse 6. **Observed times and used enchantments**—Impostors, whose trade was in occult arts, poured into Israel from Chaldea, and Manasseh became their patron, and found delight in becoming himself an adept in the black craft. The word נַחַשׁ comes from נָחַשׁ, a serpent, and means *omen ex serpentibus petere*, and passes into the meaning of divination in general. **He dealt with** *familiar spirits*, *i. e.*, either *trained* such persons, or *practised with* them, or *patronized* them; but the result was that he raised them into an official *status* in the realm. Verse 7. **Set up a graven image . . in the house, &c.**—That is, אֲשֵׁרָה, Asherah or Astarte. Clearly, from 1 Kings viii. 16; ix. 3, "the *house*" was the very sanctuary in which Jehovah Himself had dwelt, not merely in "*the courts*" (verse 5). Verses 8, 9. **The terms of Israel's stability**—"*Only if they observe to do*" (verse 8); "*but they hearkened not*" (verse 9). From their first being planted in Canaan this condition was affirmed (2 Sam. vii. 10), but they so completely degenerated from the covenant as to do more impiously than the very Canaanites who were expelled from the land that Israel might inherit it; for the Canaanites were faithful to their deities, but Israel rejected their God, and worshipped base innovations. Verse 10. **The Lord spake by His servants the prophets**—These were Hoshea, Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Isaiah. These "*words of the seers*" were kept in the national annals, along with the records of Manasseh's deeds (2 Chron. xxxiii. 18). Verse 13. **The line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab**—The vanquished, or war prisoners, were measured off with the line (קָו), as marked or separated to slaughter (2 Sam. viii. 2); the use of the *plummet* implies a levelled and cleared space, suggesting the complete clearance of Ahab's house. Verse 16. Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood—Of the godly people who would not concur in his impious deeds, and protested against them. A Jewish tradition survived even to the time of the Christian fathers that Isaiah was among the victims of Manasseh's intolerant persecutions; and it is reported that he was sawn in two while fastened to a cedar tree in which he had secreted himself. Verses 19-26. Amon's guilty reign—Following all the evils of Manasseh, he stirred such animosity among his Court attendants ("*his servants*") that an intrigue sprang up in the palace, issuing in regicide. "*The people of the land*" (verse 24), who avenged the king's death; suggesting that a popular outburst of indignation ensued, in which the conspirators against Amon were put to the slaughter. These conspiracies may suggest the opposing religious or irreligious conflicts which were struggling for ascendancy; they who slew Amon may have regarded themselves as doing God's service; the Cromwellian era in English history harmonizing therewith. And "the people" who took vengeance on these "servants" were probably prompted by exasperated attachment to Amon's idolatry, and

thought to re-instate Amon's *regime* when placing his son on the throne; but they knew not what would be the policy of that child's life. Who can predict what course will be chosen by a child as yet but "eight years old"?—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-18.

Religious Anarchy.

The reign of Manasseh was the longest and darkest in the history of Judah. The reformation under Hezekiah was superficial. Idolatry had a firm hold upon the nation, and receiving once more the patronage of royalty, rapidly became the predominating power. Being intolerant of any rival, and dreading another reaction, it strove to secure permanent supremacy. A great struggle ensued between the lovers of Jehovah and the zealots for heathenism. As in other similar conflicts in the history of the Church, the stronger party sought to drive the weaker into submission by the terrors of a blood-thirsty persecution. The most faithful and gifted of God's servants were victims; and according to tradition Isaiah was sawn asunder by the savage emissaries of Manasseh. This paragraph furnishes a gloomy description of the prevalence of *Religious Anarchy*.

I. Seen in the reckless reversal of the policy of reformation (verse 3). Manasseh showed little respect for the memory and life-work of his father. He pulled down what his father had painfully toiled for years to build up: it is so much easier to destroy than to construct. It is also a revelation of the fickleness of the people, and the shallowness of the reformation under Hezekiah, that they so readily fell in with the idolatrous policy of Manasseh. Alas! how few are there who clearly comprehend and earnestly maintain great, vital reforming principles! It takes years and generations to thoroughly impregnate the bulk of the people. And yet truth must ultimately triumph over all opposition. Over the principal gate of the city of Konigratz is a bas-relief representation of John Huss, the Bohemian Reformer, in the act of kneeling, before his martyrdom, and underneath are inscribed the words, "The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin." A reaction set in. The enemies of Huss triumphed for a time. They sought to destroy every vestige of the Reformer's work; and, as one means of obliterating his memory, they plastered over this public memorial. But the principles of the Reformation were again in the ascendant, and time crumbled the plaster which had hidden the monument, leaving distinct once more this public reminder of the great Reformer's work and sufferings. So is it with all honest reforming work. It may be obscured for years; but it will re-appear. Work done for God is immortal. It is vain to struggle against it.

II. Seen in the shameless outrages perpetrated by the votaries of a false religion (4-9). Not content with their liberty to worship idols and with the restoration of the high places and the erection of altars to Baal, the heathen party desecrated the temple of Jehovah by placing in it a carved figure of Asherah. This is regarded by the historian as the most aggravated outrage of the idolatrous king. The worst features of the reigns of Athaliah and Ahaz are outrivalled. No insult offered to Jehovah can be too offensive; no enormity the ingenuity of the heathen priests can devise is too low for the tastes and practices of the debauched king. Little do we know the depths of infamy to

which we may be dragged by our sins. Manasseh, beginning life amidst the holiest influences, sank down till he became the execration of history.

III. Seen in the outbreak of a cruel and sanguinary persecution (verse 16). The heathen party began to feel their power; and they used it mercilessly. Injury is added to insult. When they had once tasted blood they were insatiable. Every opponent, every Nonconformist, shall cease to breathe. The attempts of any future reforming kings shall be made impossible; they have had enough of that. The noblest patriots and choicest teachers were victims; among them, as is supposed, the venerable Isaiah. As in similar eruptions of fanatical cruelty, all classes suffered. It is estimated by Prudhomme that the victims of the first French Revolution numbered 1,022,351; and in the dismal catalogue of the different classes of society, he shows that, while the flower of the nobility was despatched, the humbler orders suffered the most. It is a mad, futile policy to enforce governmental or religious principles by terror and bloodshed. It only provokes reprisals often more savage than those sought to be avenged.

IV. Calls forth the special vengeance of heaven (verses 10-15). The wickedness of Manasseh was not carried on without protest and warning. The voice of the faithful prophet might be cruelly hushed in death, but the testimony was delivered and heard. Jehovah was not an indifferent spectator of the agonies of His martyred servants; and He will be avenged on the adversary. Before He strikes, He warns. The punishment of degenerate Judah shall terrify all who hear of it. The kingdom shall be shattered, and the people who are not exterminated in war shall be driven into ignominious captivity. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

LESSONS:—1. *Reform, to be permanent, must be thorough.* 2. *A nation may well mourn when the wicked are in power.* 3. *The God of the martyrs will not fail to take vengeance on His enemies and theirs.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-9. Manasseh the seduced and the seducer. Even God-fearing parents often have perverse children without any fault of their own. So much greater is the guilt of those who lead infant children astray after the death of their parents, instead of giving them care and good training. It is especially important that princes should be guided in their youth by good counsellors and governors. God is not confined with His word to any land or people. If His word is not received with love and gratitude, and if it is not feared, then He will come soon and remove the candlestick from its place, so that men may go astray and become a prey to terrible errors. To fall is easier than to rise. If the infection comes from above, it spreads with greater celerity.—*Lange.*

— The one subject of the only collection of Hebrew books we possess is —God. How different with the literature of every other people! It is necessary to remember this striking characteristic, if we would rightly estimate the religious enthusiasm under Hezekiah, or the mortal struggle against heathenism under his son Manasseh. The national party, zealous for the worship of Jehovah, the God of their fathers, looked back to a golden age under David; but since his day had seen the rise and occasional triumph of foreign heathenism, countenanced by a number of their kings and by the court and upper classes. But as in all communities, in every age, it was only a minority who cherished, with a full and intelligent conviction, the great principles which thus for a

time were triumphant The mass of the people now, as always, passively yielded themselves to the spirit of the day; ready to follow Hezekiah's reforms in the excitement of the hour, but no less so to pass over to the heathen party, should it again get the ascendancy. Two forces contended for supremacy: the national party, or Jehovah-worshippers—under the prophets—and the patrician party, who sighed for the glitter of foreign manners and the fancied security of foreign alliances, and, to secure both, were eager to adopt the heathenism of the neighbouring monarchies.—*Geikie's* Hours with the Bible.

Verse 1. Kingship. 1. Involves great cares and responsibilities. 2. Is too heavy and cumbrous for inexperienced youth. 3. Presents an opportunity for working out great good or great evil.

— Manasseh's minority, spent under the influence of guardians who were hostile to the religious principles and reforming policy of his father, may account in part for the anti-theocratic principles of his reign. The work of religious reformation which Hezekiah had zealously carried on was but partially accomplished. There was little appearance of its influence on the heart and manners of the people at large. On the contrary, the true fear of God had vanished from the mass of the people, corruption and vice increased, and were openly practised by the degenerate leaders who, having got the young prince Manasseh into their power, directed his education, trained him up in their views, and seduced him into the open patronage of idolatry.—*Jamieson.*

— Manasseh and Josiah. 1. Both began to reign in early life. 2. Both were powerfully influenced by their mothers. 3. Both had widely different careers—the reign of Manasseh was the darkest, and of Josiah the brightest period of the later history of Judah.

Verses 2–9. Unexampled wickedness—Evidenced. 1. In the contemptuous manner in which the example of a good father is regarded. 2. In the irreverent and insulting treatment of God's own house. 3. In the way in which the worst abominations of the heathen are outrivalled. 4. In enforcing idolatry upon the people, and utterly ignoring the existence of Jehovah. 5. The more reprehensible in those who have been taught the knowledge of the true God.

Verse 6. The rule of superstition. 1. Depends upon the extent of popular ignorance. 2. Maintained by sleight of hand and a parade of wisdom. 3. Is dissipated by the advance of true science.

— A great influx of these impostors had, at various times, poured from Chaldea into the land of Israel to pursue their gainful occupations, especially during the reigns of the latter kings; and Manasseh was not only their liberal patron, but zealous to appear himself an adept in the arts. He raised them into an influential class at his court, as they were in that of Assyria and Babylon, where nothing was done till they had ascertained the lucky hour and promised a happy issue.—*Jamieson.*

Verses 7, 8. Idolatrous intrusion into the Temple. 1. Outrages the majesty and supremacy of Jehovah. 2. Insults the Divine purity. 3. Indicates the loss of all respect for the Divine commands and promises.

Verse 9. There was a gradation in the apostacy of Judah similar to that of Israel. Ahaz abandoned the worship of Jehovah, but did not seduce the generality of his subjects; whereas the height and front of Manasseh's offending was that his pernicious influence carried the whole nation along with him into idolatry.—*Jamieson.*

— What havoc does this wicked son of Hezekiah make in the church of God. As if he had been born to ruin religion; as if his only felicity had been to untwist or tear in one day that holy web which his father

had been weaving nine and twenty years; to set up that offensive pile which had been above three hundred years in pulling down: so long had the high places stood. The zeal of Hezekiah in demolishing them honoured him above all his predecessors; and now the first act of this green head was their re-edifying. That mischief may be done in a day, which many ages cannot redress.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 10-15. **Unexampled punishment.** 1. Shall be of such a character as to appal all who hear of it (verse 12). 2. Shall be a complete and humiliating national overthrow (verse 13). 3. Shall abandon the victims to the cruel ravages of the enemy. 4. Merited by lengthened provocation.

Verse 10. This doom of utter and universal extermination, which was threatened against Judah, was averted by repentance, at least to a certain extent, inasmuch as a large portion of Judah was restored from the Babylonish captivity. But it was executed on the kingdom of Israel, which, as the sin of its people had been over a longer duration and of a more aggravated character, was more severely punished.—*Jamieson.*

Verse 12. We are sensible of the least touch of our own miseries; how rarely are we affected with other men's calamities! Yet this evil shall be such as that the rumour of it shall beat no ear that shall not glow with an astonishing commiseration.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 13. **The standard of Divine judgment.** 1. Is based on unchanging principles of justice. 2. Takes into account the circumstances under which the offence is committed. 3. Necessitates the most thorough punishment of unrepented wrong-doing.

— A dish is turned over when there is nothing more in it. That is the hardest punishment which God can inflict on a soul which turns away from Him. There is then no longer a drop to be found in it of that which was in it before.

Verse 16. **The persecuting spirit.** 1. Riots in cruelty and bloodshed. 2. Makes no distinction between the innocent and guilty. 3. Is most vindictive towards those who have the courage to expose its wickedness. 4. Is limited only by its power and opportunities.

— Idolatry and tyranny are closely allied. Those whom Satan has in his toils he leads from one sin to another. Enmity to the word of God is not merely a different opinion or contradiction in regard to religious matters, but a devilish power which impels even to the shedding of innocent blood. It is possible to kill the preachers of truth, but not the truth itself. He who was the Truth was nailed to the Cross, but His words remain, though heaven and earth pass away. The blood of the martyrs only fertilized the soil of the Church, so that it has borne richer and more abundant fruit. All innocent blood cries to heaven as that of Abel did.—*Lange.*

Verses 17, 18. The variations respecting the fate of Manasseh are complicated. In the Jewish Church his name was stamped with peculiar infamy. If a noble name had to be replaced by an odious one, that of Manasseh was substituted. His life in the book of Kings closes without any relieving trait. It was considered as the turning-point of Judah's sins. The doom was pronounced irreversible by any subsequent reforms.—*Stanley.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 19-26.

The Crime of Assassination.

I. Is but lightly regarded where religious principle is demoralized (verses 20-22). When the bonds of religious obligations are relaxed, the way

is opened for the commission of the worst crimes. Every sin blunts the moral sense and makes it easier to sin again, until the lowest grade of crime is reached. The peace, safety, and prosperity of a nation are more indebted to the prevalence of true religion than the majority are inclined to admit. Religion is the curb that holds in check the fierce monster of crime, that would otherwise stalk through the land and work irreparable mischief.

II. Is unjustifiable, notwithstanding the wickedness of its victim. We stand aghast at the wickedness of those in power, and are apt to think any means justifiable that will put an end to it. Even the unjust detest the injustice of others. A hatred of evil may tempt one into hasty and excessive punishment of wrong, forgetting that "when our hatred is violent it sinks us even beneath those we hate." It is difficult to restrain the national thirst for revenge when in the midst of injustice and suffering. "If the wicked flourish," says Fuller, "and thou suffer, be not discouraged; they are fatted for destruction, thou art dieted for health." We may safely leave the wicked in the hands of God. We may create greater evils by the way in which we strive to redress one single offence.

III. Is aggravated when committed by those whose duty it is to guard and protect (verse 23). Amon was slain by his court attendants, who took advantage of the confidence and trust reposed in them. In the most unguarded moment, and when least suspecting treachery, he was slain in the privacy of his palace; his servants, towards whom he had shown kindness and honour, became traitors and murderers.

> Is there a crime
> Beneath the roof of heaven that stains the soul
> With more infernal hue than damned
> Assassination? *Cibber.*

And it certainly adds to the heinousness of the crime when the fatal blow is prompted by a false heart.

IV. Sooner or later meets with terrible punishment (verse 24). The conspirators and assassins met with a similar fate to their victim. Sin carries within it its own punishment. The most cleverly devised mischief is sure to return in some shape or other to plague the inventors.

> This even-handed justice
> Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice
> To our own lips.

In the history of the kings we are now studying, there is nothing more frequently and impressively revealed than the operation of the inexorable law of retribution. The triumph of the wicked is brief. The gains of sin are not worth the ingenuity and toil. The wages of sin is death.

LESSONS:—1. *Assassination is not only a savage, but a useless, policy.* 2. *A wrong is never rectified by inflicting a greater wrong.* 3. *True religion teaches the sacredness of human life.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 19-26. How wretchedly a king appears of whom history has nothing more to record than his godlessness! As the king, so are his officers; as is the governor, so are the citizens. A depraved king ruins his country. Unfaithfulness is punished by unfaithfulness. Amon was not

faithful to God: unfaithfulness was his punishment. He was murdered by his own servants, and these in their turn were punished by their own sin—they also were murdered (Matt. xxvi. 52; Luke vi. 28). Tumult and murder, perpetrated now by the authorities, now by the people—those are the natural fruits which are produced in a land which has abandoned God, and in which His word is no longer respected.—*Lange.*

Verses 20-24. Amon himself seems to have been popular; but, from whatever cause, he roused the enmity of the court party. It could not be laid to his charge that he refused to comply with the established heathenism, for it is expressly said that he walked in his father's steps, and served and worshipped the idols he had set up, multiplying his trespasses, and showing some of the penitent humility of Manasseh's late years. It may be, however, that signs of a serious thoughtfulness, not as yet carried into outward act, alarmed the dominant faction, for within two years he was cut off by a palace conspiracy, like that by which his ancestor, king Joash, perished.—*Geikie.*

Verses 23, 24. Conspiracy and murder. 1. Reveal a melancholy picture of national demoralization. 2. May occasion a worse state of misrule than that which is sought to be removed. 3. Recoil in terrible vengeance on the actors themselves.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST EFFORT OF REFORMATION UNDER JOSIAH.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—**Verse 2. He did that which was right**—In his minority Josiah was guarded and directed by godly teachers and counsellors. Yet *training* is not to be wholly accredited with the difference between Manasseh and Josiah, who both, during their minority, must have been under tutors and governors. The *natural bent of disposition* is a factor in reckoning; and yet further, the *sovereign operation of God's grace.* Verses 3-7. **The repair of the temple**—For 250 years, since the reign of Jehoash (xii. 5), the fabric had been allowed to decay. Besides "Shaphan the scribe" here mentioned, Chronicles adds Maaseiah the city governor, and Joah the chancellor (2 Chron. xxxiv. 8); for the work was not to be a private undertaking by the king and priests, but civic and national. Verse 8. **Hilkiah the high priest said . . I have found the book of the law**—The temple roll was ordered to be kept by the side of the ark (Deut. xxxi. 26), but during the idolatrous profanations under Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon, the very ark had been removed (*comp.* 2 Chron. xxxv. 3) from the house; and doubtless in this way the "book" had become lost. Dr. Bähr notes that מָצָא is here emphatic, and does not mean to *fall in with something* which is *known to be somewhere at hand*, but to *discover* what was *concealed.* It would seem that the written law of God had passed from human knowledge, lost in the haze of heathenism, which had so long enveloped the land. Although this finding of "the book of the law" does not imply that the nation or the priests had no other copy, yet the narrative clearly indicates that king and people were strangers to its contents. Shaphan the scribe "*read it*" (verse 8) as if it were a new thing come to hand. He moreover "*read it before the king*" (verse 10) as being an unknown book to the monarch, and deserving his attention; whereas the effect its words produced upon Josiah plainly show that he heard them then for the first time (verse 11). Controversy is keen as to what this "book" was; whether only a section of the Pentateuch—*i. e.*, the book of Deuteronomy—of the complete book of the law of Moses. Hilkiah calls it סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה, "*the* book of the law," the technical form of expression distinctive of the entire Pentateuch. Shaphan however, speaks of it to the king as "*a* book" (verse 10), without describing it in any way further. Hilkiah's emphatic word, "*the* book," implies that either *no other copy had been known to exist*, or that *this copy* was *different from, more complete*, than any other possessed. And the latter alternative meaning of his words gives opportunity for the theory that Deuteronomy was then first seen by them, for Deuteronomy contains just those searching words which would lead the king to distress. But if other copies existed, and

Deuteronomy were an appendage, comparison would soon have led to the rejection of this spurious addition to the book as Moses left it. The natural meaning is that the written law had been lost, its substance meanwhile only existing in memory, or as a tradition; but that now the very Word of God was found. Verse 11. When the king had heard the words—Shaphan did not read the entire book, but read *therein*, בּוֹ (2 Chron. xxxiv. 18); and if Deuteronomy were read (see chaps. xxvii., xxviii.) there would be found sufficient there to account for Josiah's alarm (*comp.* v. 18). Verse 14. Huldah the prophetess (now she dwelt in Jerusalem)—This fact of her being accessible accounts sufficiently for their seeking her. *Jeremiah*, the conspicuous prophet of Josiah's reign, who for five years had been witnessing for Jehovah against His godless nation (for he began his work in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, *see* Jer. i. 2, while this finding the law occurred in the eighteenth year) lived at that time in Anathoth in Benjamin. Of Huldah we know nothing beyond what this incident reveals. Her husband was "*keeper of the wardrobe*," more probably of the priests' garments than of the royal wardrobe, and she "dwelt in the college," rather, "*in the other part*," or the lower city. Verses 15-20. God's denunciations should have absolute fulfilment, albeit Josiah should be spared seeing them, because his "*heart was tender*," and he had humbled himself before the Lord.—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-18.

The Awakening Power of the Divine Word.

I. That it is a great national calamity when the Divine Word is neglected and forgotten. For more than half a century the influence of idolatry, in its grossest aspects, reigned supreme in Judah. The apostate people ignored the Divine law, which accused them too faithfully of their sins. By many it was forgotten, and treated as if it did not exist. Only a few of the faithful—the prophets and some of the better classes—would possess a copy. The guiding star of the nation was quenched; and the people grovelled in ever deepening darkness. The state, like a rudderless vessel, drifted into anarchy and crime. The Bible—read, studied, loved—is a nation's blessing, and its absence a national calamity. Napoleon, with true insight, placed the Bible in the political division of his library; and he who faithfully teaches the contents of that book, gives to the world its fairest, happiest shape.

II. That the most striking discoveries of the Divine Word are often made in connection with the Temple. No repairs of any moment had been done to the Temple since the days of Joash—more than two hundred years before. One of the first acts of Josiah was to restore the mutilated building and purge it of its idolatrous abuses. In the progress of this laudable work, the Divine Law was formed, probably in the hand-writing of Moses; and this discovery had an important influence upon the succeeding efforts of religious reform. And is it not in connection with the work of the Temple that we have first sighted our freshest, most awe-inspiring, and most abiding views of Divine truth? The Bible has become another book to us, in its flashes of celestial light and openings of profound depths, as we have "enquired in the Temple."

III. That the declarations of the Divine Word awaken the deepest interest and concern in the mind of the sincere seeker after truth. The Bible has an interest all its own to the antiquarian, the historian, and the philosophic critic; but it comes with a piercing significance and manifold suggestiveness to the man who is in quest of the highest truth. Josiah was singularly prepared for the revelation vouchsafed to him. His mind was keenly alert in its receptiveness; hence the profound, alarming impression created by the Divine record. The Bible will be a closed or open book to us according to the spirit we bring to its study. To the cold, scoffing sceptic it is a dumb Sphinx,

refusing to utter its secrets; to the humble, earnest student, it sparkles with the radiance of a palace of gems. Its threatenings may well terrify, for they are true; and its promises soothe the distress its denunciations cause.

IV. That a mind awakened by the Divine Word is emboldened to undertake the most difficult work of reform. Whatever dim visions of reform Josiah may have cherished before, it is noticeable that from the moment he became acquainted with the mind of God as contained in the discovered book, his efforts after reformation amounted to a passion. He saw it to be the one work of his life, and he entered into it with a zeal, a determination, a thoroughness that might be accused of violence. It was a desperate attempt to reverse, if possible, the threatened doom of Judah. It is in the light and teaching of God's word that our life-work becomes most clearly defined to us. Here we learn what sacrifices must be made, what points must be guarded, what work is worthy of our powers and possible for us to do, and where to find the source of inspiration and strength in every struggle.

LESSONS:—1. *The light of the Divine Word cannot be permanently obscured.* 2. *The Divine word is the surest guide amid national defection and error.* 3. *The Divine word supplies the most potent motives in all aggressive reforms.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1, 2. Josiah, the kingly reformer: an example of youthful piety. For many reasons, Josiah is one of the most interesting characters in Old Testament history. The son and successor of a weak and worthless king, he was a mere child when called by the unanimous voice of the nation to the throne. He is remarkable as having been the most faultless of all the kings of Judah or Israel; and his reign is remarkable for the thorough and wide-spread national reformation, of which he was the moving cause. His premature death, at the age of thirty-nine, may be said to have brought to a close the prosperity of the kingdom of Judah. "The reign of this prince is like a gleam cast from a lowering sky before it bursts with the tempest. Under his government Judah rose only to fall with greater violence afterwards" (*Evans*). None of her kings had been more deservedly beloved; none was more tenderly lamented. The prophet Jeremiah, who flourished during the greater part of his reign, composed his funeral elegy, and for ages afterwards his memory was cherished with the fondest regret. The author of the apocryphal book of "Ecclesiasticus" indulges in this glowing panegyric (chap. xlix. 1-4):—"The remembrance of Josias is like the composition of the perfume that is made by the art of the apothecary; it is sweet as honey in all mouths, and as music at the banquet of wine. He behaved himself uprightly in the conversion of the people, and took away the abomination of iniquity. He directed his heart unto the Lord, and in the time of the ungodly he established the worship of God. All, except David, and Hezekiah, and Josias, were defective." To have perpetuated such tender regards in the hearts of the Jewish nation for so long a period, and to be spoken of to this day as the Timothy of the Old Testament, the pattern of youthful piety, and of reverence for God's word—the last good king of Judah must have been no ordinary man. The records of the first half of his comparatively brief life are very scanty, yet they contain some points worthy of note. We have here—1. A child king; 2. A boy-king seeking God; 3. A youthful royal reformer. 1. *He was the good son of a wicked father.* We see Hezekiah, a most pious king, succeeded by Manasseh, by far the most abandoned

prince who ever sat on the throne of David. But in Josiah we have a "root out of a dry ground." Young persons who are seeking to live a godly life under unfavourable circumstances, in an irreligious or careless family, among ungodly companions, should take comfort and courage from the case of Josiah, whose *father's* influence and example, in so far as they could be impressed on one so young, were wholly evil. 2. It is probable that the bias of his mind towards religion was *due to maternal training*. The only notice of his mother is a very brief one, and nothing definite is recorded as to her influence upon his earliest years; but considering that even though a king, he was too young to dispense with a mother's care and training, and that twenty years of his life were passed in comparative privacy, may we not reasonably infer that the seeds of religious instruction dropped from a mother's hand into his young mind, bore fruit many days after in personal decision for God, and national reformation? A mother's influence, in a religious point of view, cannot be over-estimated. 3. We see this early training bearing fruit in due season in what would have been spoken of as *his conversion:* "While he was yet young" (viz., at 16 years of age), "He began to seek after the God of David, his father." Religion became to him what it must become to all—a matter of *personal* concern. His father's wickedness would not condemn, nor his mother's piety avail to save, him. Amos saw his father Manasseh penitent and forgiven when he was old, but did not copy his example. Josiah was the son of ungodly Amon, and yet he became a godly child. Grace is not hereditary like houses, and lands, and titles. Piety does not run in the blood. Religion is a personal matter. "Every one shall give account of *himself* unto God." "The salvation of a father does not bear his son into heaven; the loss of a parent in his own sin does not tear away his converted child from the love of God.—*Arnot.*

(4) *The piety of Josiah was developed in spite of unfavourable surroundings.*—"The people were surely deteriorating; sinking lower and lower in the social and moral degradations inseparable from the cruel and licentious forms of worship to which they were so fatally addicted. Idolatry had eaten into the heart and life of the nation (*Venables*). Yet this awful condition of national life did not lead Josiah to swim with the current. Single handed he resolved to stem the tide of national ungodliness. Instead of becoming the creature of circumstances, he rose to the occasion, and became their master. Personal piety was followed up by religious zeal. It needed courage to declare himself on the Lord's side, when the whole current of the nation's life was sweeping on in an entirely opposite direction. This is the true order. Personal piety *first;* zeal for the religious welfare of others *next*. Like charity, piety must "begin at home," if it is to be of any value in a wider sphere. 5. *He begins the work of a religious reformer.* "Acting as only Eastern monarchs can, he set about ridding the country of every trace of idolatry" (*Geikie*). He had now the authority fairly in his own hands, and displayed independence of action. His great design was to extirpate idolatry, and restore the religion of Jehovah. The desperate case of the nation demanded stringent measures. "The pagan worship was uprooted with the same punctilious care as that which, during the Paschal season, the houses of Israelites were to be cleansed from every morsel of leaven. Every instrument or image, if of wood, was burnt; if of metal or stone, was shattered to pieces and ground to powder" (*Stanley.*) Notice, as to this reformation—(*a*) *It was personally superintended.* He made a tour throughout his kingdom, and even beyond it (2 Chron. xxxiv. 6). At least six years were occupied in this work. It could not be done in a moment; it would not have been done thoroughly had he not been present, lending th weight of his example and authority. Work for God is best done, as a rule, when done in *person*. (*b*)

It was perseveringly carried on. Though carried out with zeal, and even severity, the work could not be accomplished all at once. "The very act of destroying every idol, and exterminating the idolatrous priests, which would require a minute search into every remote dwelling, would necessarily occupy much time. But probably, in addition to this, Josiah had to encounter much obstinacy. All who know anything of human nature must be aware how very difficult it is to cleanse the fountain of men's minds, and force the stream from a defiled to a purer channel" (The History of Josiah—*Anon*—Lond., 1842.) In spite of the unfriendly spirit of the bulk of the nation, cheered only perhaps by a single prophet, Josiah persevered in his arduous, but necessary, work of destruction. There is need not only of courage, but of perseverance in the Lord's work still. (*c*) *It was brought to a successful issue.* The six years' labour were not in vain. The country was, for the time being, effectually cleansed, leaving Josiah free to turn his attention to the condition of the temple at Jerusalem. Though his work can scarcely find its exact parallel in modern times, and under the more benignant dispensation of Christ, Josiah's *spirit* of persevering zeal against all evil may well be copied by Christian workers.

GENERAL LESSONS:—(1) *The possibility and the beauty of early piety.* Josiah, Joseph, Samuel, Obadiah, Timothy. (2) *Seeking and finding God early saves from many evils, and ensures many blessings.* 3. *The most useful Christians are generally those who have sought the Lord in their early days.* Did not Josiah's early piety help him to the formation of a strong, earnest, godly, useful manhood? Oh! let no young life be tempted to say:—

"I am too young—the stirring voice of morning,
Calls me to wander gaily while I may;
My heart leaps up, restraint and task-work scorning:
Not now the hard won steep—the narrow way.
When time shall bring my treasure's desolation,
And no more sweetness in life's cup shall be,
The bitter dregs will do for a libation
To Him who died for me."
Hom. Quarterly.

— We ought not to despair of the children of the godless, and to give them up; they may become, as in this case Josiah did, the most pious, through whom God accomplishes wonders. Good instruction and discipline may, by the blessing of God, correct much evil which such children have inherited or learned from their parents.—*Lange.*

Verse 2. **Josiah an example for young men.** I. **The piety of Josiah as illustrative of the power of a good example.** "He walked in all the ways of David his father." Few influences are more powerful than that of example. The child imitates his parent; the school-boy his class-mate; the youth his play-fellows; and so on, through every stage of life. Note in what recorded actions of Josiah there were marks of an imitation of David's example. 1. The first of these in order of time was his *attachment* to God's *house and his devotion to God's service.* When he had purged the land of idols, he gave directions for the repair of the Temple. For this object the people contributed liberally; incited thereto by the example of their princes, and especially of their young king. Josiah's acts remind us of David's preparation for the building of the Temple. 2. *His love to the word of God.* Turn to the narrative in 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14-21. David said of the man who is blessed, that "his delight is in the law of God." There is no book more valuable to the young. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by giving heed thereto according to thy word." What boy is not delighted with stories of enterprise and adventure? Where can more entrancing ones be found than which tell of Israel's war, the prophets' dangers, and Paul's travels? What youth does not love poetry?

And what are Milton and all his compeers—what their writings—to the poetry of the Hebrew bards? 3. *His reverence for Godly men.* See Chap. xxiii. 15-18. We know enough of David's life to recognize in this respect for a man of God an imitation of his example. The servants are to be revered; to be "esteemed very highly for their work's sake." Goodness is always worthy of regard, and he who does not respect it tells us that he has no goodness in himself to be respected. II. The piety of Josiah as illustrative of the strict integrity of godliness. "He turned not aside to the right hand, nor to the left." The man of the world may turn his creed, and shape his course "according to the fashion of the varying hour;" but not the Christian. *He* must bear in mind the words of wisdom: "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." 1. Josiah was not influenced by *the force of ancient custom*, when that custom ran counter to the course pointed out by conscience. Amidst all the idolatry already referred to, the Temple service was still performed—but slovenly, disgracefully, repulsively. Josiah said this should be so no longer. His reforms, depend upon it, were cried out against as innovations. The service had been good enough for his seniors: why were they not good enough for him? Because they were not good enough for his God; and, heedless of fault-finding, and complaining, and backbiting, and all the usual resources of the followers of "ancient custom," he had the Temple repaired, and the sacrifices slain, and the singers and skilled musicians employed, and the porters waiting at the Temple gate; and all was done "according to that which was written in the law of the Lord." 2. He was not influenced by *any feeling of false shame.* When the book of the law was found and read before him, he rent his clothes, feeling that he was a sinner. Calling his servants, he said: "Go and inquire of the Lord for *me* and for them that are left," &c. Many are turned away from the way of God for fear of others. This is especially the danger of young people, who shrink from ridicule. Remember that those who honour God, He will honour. III. The piety of Josiah illustrates the course of life that ensures Divine approval. "He did that which was right in the sight of God." It is comparatively easy to pursue a course that seems right to ourselves, or that may secure the applause of the world. It is a widely-different matter so to live as to ensure the approval and commendation of God. 1. By far the greater part of men seem to live for self. They have no care or consideration for others. Selfishness is the vilest principle that ever spread in this world. 2. Others care most about the approval of the world These are selfish, too. It is because that applause is gratifying to their selfish vanity. The man who would lick the dust to secure the favour of a fellow mortal would sacrifice his dearest friend for gain. 3. They only are God-like who do and love that which is holy and true; who live not for themselves, but for others and for God.

APPLICATION:—

Have an object in life! Live! Do not be content with mere existence. Remember, there is but one unfailing condition of true greatness, and that is—goodness.

"Life's more than breath and the quick round of blood:
It is a great spirit, and a busy heart.
* * * He most lives
Who thinks most—feels the noblest—acts the best." *The Study and Pulpit.*

Verses 3-8. The restoration of God's House.—1. Is prompted by a devout and generous love for the sanctuary. 2. Is carried on with enthusiasm and fidelity by those whose hearts are in the work. 3. May be the occasion of making important discoveries of truth.

— How well doth it beseem the care of a religious prince to set the priests and scribes in hand with re-edifying the Temple! The command is the king's, the charge is the high

priest's, the execution is the workmen's. When the labourers are faithful in doing the work, and the high priest in directing it, and the king in enjoining it, God's house cannot fail of a happy perfection; but when any of these slackens, the business must needs languish.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 7. **Honesty.**—1. A strong recommendation for work requiring trust and responsibility. 2. Can afford to dispense with count and reckoning. 3. Should not be less honest by keeping strictest count and reckoning. 4. Ought not to be unnecessarily tempted.

Verse 8. **The preservation of the Holy Scriptures.**—1. One of the most marvellous features of their history. 2. Accomplished, notwithstanding unfaithfulness of custodians, jealousy of sects, and fierce attacks of numerous enemies. 3. A strong collateral proof of their Divine character.

— The whole history of Israel bears witness to the guiding and controlling hand of God; but if there is any one event in which, more than in any other, the providence of God is visible, then it is this important discovery. It was a physical proof that God watches over this document, which is the testimonial to Israel of its election, and the highest Divine revelation, that He preserves from the rage of idolaters, and that, even if it lies long unnoticed and unknown in the night of apostasy, he will bring it again to light and make it to show its force once more. The discovery of the book was a pledge to the king and people of the indestructibility of the Divine written word.—*Lange.*

— It is hard for us to realize the full force of this discovery. We can scarcely conceive of a state of things in which, during centuries of the nominal establishment of Christianity, the people should still observe solemn festivals at the old sites of Druidical worship, the altars of Thor and Woden and Freya should smoke with sacrifices in every city, town, and village; their statues be set up in our cathedrals, and the heights round London should be crowned with the temples of Sivah and Juggernaut, all this lasting for centuries, with an occasional and partial return to the purer form of worship, while the Bible, never multiplied by printing, and only known in older and purer times through infrequent readings by the clergy, should have been utterly lost and forgotten. Add to this the supposition that the lost volume contained, not the dark symbols of the apocalypse, but the clear warning of national destruction and captivity to befal us because of these idolatries, and then let us imagine our feelings on its sudden discovery. No wonder that Josiah rent his clothes, and could not rest till he found a prophet to expound these terrible denunciations!—*Dr. Smith's Student Scripture History.*

— What a shame is it that Bibles, now so common, are so little set by amongst us, when our devout forefathers would have purchased some few chapters at a great rate! It is a sad complaint that Moulin makes of the French Protestants; whilst they burnt us, says he, for reading the scriptures, we burnt with zeal to be reading them. Now with our liberty is bred also negligence and disesteem of God's word.—*Trapp.*

Verse 11. O gracious tenderness of Josiah! He does but once hear the law read, and is thus humbled; humbled for his father's sins, for the sins of his people. How many of us, after a thousand hammerings of the menaces of God's law upon our guilty souls, continue yet insensible of our danger! The very reading of this law thus affects him, the preaching of it stirs not us; the sins of others struck thus deep with him, our own are slighted by us. A soft heart is the best tempered for God. So physicians are wont to like those bodies best which are easiest to work upon. O God! make our clay wax, and our wax pliable to thine hand, so shall we be sure to be free either from sin, or from the hurt of sin.—*Bp. Hall.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 14-20.

The Revelation of the Divine Purpose.

I. Is clearly interpreted by a duly authorised messenger (verse 14). Though little is known of Huldah, the prophetess, there is sufficient to indicate that she must have been a remarkably gifted woman. Her great influence in Jerusalem is shown by the fact that the high priest and the king's most trusted ministers seek light from her. It is but rare that the prophetic function is bestowed on woman. There are only two other prophetesses mentioned in the Old Testament—Miriam (Ex. xv. 20), and Deborah (Judges ix. 4); but neither of these seemed to touch the high spiritual elevation reached by Huldah. In the spirit of ecstacy, they sang sacred songs and excited the enthusiasm of the people after signal victories; but they did not prophesy, like Huldah, in that higher sphere of Divine authority which warranted the use of the phrase—"Thus saith the Lord." The Divine Spirit is no respecter of person or sex in the distribution of His precious gifts. The Divine word can be interpreted only by those who are taught by the Divine spirit. As the scientist should be most competent to interpret science, so the spiritual man should be the best authority in explaining spiritual things.

II. Furnishes reasons for the exercise of Divine vengeance (verses 15-17). God never strikes without sufficient warning and remonstrance. In this instance Huldah announces that punishment will be imposed because Judah had abandoned Jehovah, and rendered homage to other gods. This treachery was so bold, so persistent, so inveterate, that vengeance was inevitable. Still Jehovah pauses to reason, to explain, to make it clear He does not act from vindictiveness and passion; the offender provokes his own ruin. Napoleon once said, "Vengeance has no foresight;" and this is true regarding human vengeance. Not so with God; the reasons for the Divine procedure are so far revealed as to justify God, and leave man without excuse or cause of complaint.

III. Indicates the Divine willingness to show mercy to the sincerely penitent (verses 18-20.) The tears and pleadings of Josiah touched the heart of God, and he was spared the pain of witnessing the calamities of his country. How eager is our God to show mercy; how slow to punish.

> Heaven has but
> Our sorrow for our sins, and then delights
> To pardon erring man. Sweet mercy seems
> Its darling attribute, which limits justice,
> As if there were degrees in infinite:
> An infinite would rather want perfection,
> Than punish to extent. *Dryden.*

Lessons:—1. *The Divine purpose may be deciphered in great national changes.* 2. *The Divine purpose is plainly revealed in rewards and punishments.* 3. *The Divine wrath may be averted by timely repentance and reform.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 14. **The dignity of woman.** 1. In being exalted to an office of great responsibility and power. 2. In being highly gifted with intellectual and spiritual insight. 3. In commanding the respect and homage of the great. 4. In being honoured and inspired to authoritatively interpret the will of God.

— The grave priest, the learned

scribe, the honourable courtiers do not disdain to knock at the door of a prophetess; neither do any of them say, it were hard if we should not have as much acquaintance with God as a woman. But, in humble acknowledgment of her graces, they come to learn the will of God from her mouth. True piety is modest, and stands not upon terms of reputation in the businesses of God, but willingly honours his gifts in any subject, least of all in itself.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 16-19. The Divine wrath. 1. Is explicitly declared against all workers of iniquity (ver. 16). 2. Is unalterable in its attitude towards obstinate apostasy (ver. 17). 3. Is postponed by sincere repentance and self-humiliation (verses 18, 19). 4. Will inevitably overtake the impenitent wicked.

19. A tender heart. 1. Is keenly susceptible to good influences. 2. Is powerfully affected with the malignant nature of sin. 3. Compassionates the terrible condition of the victims of sin. 4. Finds a profound and immediate response in the tender mercy of God.

— How happy a thing it is to be a reed unto God's judgments, rather than an oak! The meek and gentle reed stoops, and therefore stands; the oak stands stiffly out against the strongest gust, and therefore is turned up by the roots. At least, let us lament those sins we have not avoided; and mourn for the sins of others while we hate our own.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 19, 20. Josiah, a pattern for the ignorant. Both the character and the fortunes of Josiah are described in these words: his character, his heart was tender and he feared God: his fortunes, an untimely death, designed as a reward for his obedience. Josiah was brought up among very wicked men, in a corrupt court, after an apostasy of more than half a century, far from God's prophets and in the midst of idols. He had every temptation to go wrong; and had he done so, we might have made allowances, and said that he was not so bad as the other kings, for he knew no better; he had not sinned against light. Yes, he would have sinned against light—the event shows it; for if he had light enough to go right (which he had, for he did go right), it follows, that if he had gone wrong, it would have been against light. This is very important. Everyone, even the poorest and most ignorant, has knowledge enough to be religious. Education does not make a man religious; nor is it an excuse for a man's disobedience that he has not been educated in his duty. Josiah had that which all men have, heathen as well as Christian, till they pervert or blunt it—a natural sense of right or wrong; and he did not blunt it. His heart was *tender;* he acknowledged a constraining force in the Divine voice within him; he heard and obeyed. Though all the world had told him otherwise, he could not believe and would not, that he might sin without offence, with impunity; that he might be sensual, or cruel, after the manner of idolaters, and nothing would come of it. And further, amid all the various worships offered to his acceptance, this same inward sense of his, strengthened by practice, unhesitatingly chose out the true one, the worship of the god of Israel. Such was the beginning of Josiah's life. At sixteen he began to seek after the god of his fathers; at twenty he commenced his reformation with a resolute faith and true-hearted generous devotion. From the language of Scripture, it would seem, he began of *himself;* thus he is left a pattern to all ages of prompt obedience for conscience' sake. At first not having the book of the law to guide him, he took such measures as natural conscience suggested; he put away idolatry generally. Thus he set out not knowing whither he went. But it is the rule of God's providence that those who act up to their light shall be rewarded with clearer light. Accordingly, while he was thus engaged, after a few years, he found the book of the law in the *course* of his reformations. Josiah's conduct on this dis-

covery marks his character. Many men, certainly many young men, who had been so zealous as he had already shown himself for six years, would have prided themselves on what they had done, and though they began humbly, by this time would have become self-willed, self-confident, and hard-hearted. Far from it; his peculiar praise is singleness of mind, a pure conscience. His was not that stern enthusiasm which has displayed itself in some so-called reformations, fancying itself God's peculiar choice, and despising others. Here we have the pattern of reformers, singleness of heart, gentleness of temper, in the midst of zeal, resoluteness and decision in action. All God's saints have this union of opposite graces: Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Nehemiah, St. Paul; but in which of them all is the wonder-working power of grace shown more attractively than in Josiah? Observe his conduct when the law was read to him—"he rent his clothes." He thought far more of what he had not done, than of what he had done. He felt how incomplete his reformation had been; and he felt how far more guilty his whole people were than he had supposed, receiving, as they had, such precise guidance in Scripture what to do, and such solemn command to do it; and he learned, moreover, the fearful punishment which was hanging over them, for in that Book of the Law were contained the threats of vengeance to be fulfilled in case of transgression. Observe in what Josiah's chief excellence lay—"he turned not aside to the right hand or to the left" (verse 2). He kept the narrow middle way. Now what is this strict virtue called? It is called faith. It is no matter whether we call it faith or conscientiousness, they are in substance one and the same. Where there is faith there is conscientiousness, where there is conscientiousness there is faith. They may be distinguished from each other in words, but they are not divided in fact. They belong to one, and but one, habit of mind—dutifulness; they show themselves in obedience, in the careful, anxious observance of God's will, however we learn it. And this is called faith, because it implies a reliance on the mere word of the unseen God overpowering the temptations of sin. May God grant that we, like Josiah, may improve our gifts, and trade and make merchandise with them, so that when he cometh to reckon with us, we may be accepted!—Condensed from *J. H. Newman.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF IDOLATRY BY JOSIAH.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1. **The king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah**—Not content to hide from coming ill under God's promise of immunity to himself personally, Josiah's patriotism led him to a fervent effort to recall his nation to the Lord, and turn aside impending doom. Verse 6. **He brought out the grove from the house of the Lord** (see on xxi. 7). **Cast the powder thereof on the graves of the children of the people**—In 2 Chron. xxxiv. 4 it is rendered, "upon the graves of them that had *sacrificed unto them*," thus profaning the sepulchres of those idolaters. Verse 7. **He brake down the houses of the Sodomites**—Concerning these "Sodomites" *see* Notes on 1 Kings xiv. 24. These booths were scenes of lustful revelry; these "women who wove hangings for Asherah," being debased creatures, who, together with others of their sex, prostituted themselves in homage of this goddess. **All this** "*in the house of the Lord.*" Verse 9. **Did eat of the unleavened bread**—The phrase means that they lived upon the altar offerings; they came not near God's altar, but stayed at home enjoying the fruit of their profession "among their brethren." Verse 10. **He defiled Topheth**—The spot in the valley of Hinnon where children were sacrificed to Molech. "Tophet" is variously interpreted, as from תָּפַף, *to spit out, detest*, an abomination, therefore; or from תֹּף, *a drum*, the dominating interpretation of Jewish writers being that the cries of the perishing children were drowned by that instrument. [illegible]

Took away the horses—Not figures of horses, but living, kept for drawing the sun-chariot in the idolatrous processions. Horses were also sacrificed in the worship of the sun. Verse 13. **On the right hand of the mount of corruption**—The hilly range on the east of Jerusalem called the Mount of Olives, has three summits, whose central or southernmost peak is named the "Mount of Corruption," from the idol temples there reared by Solomon. Verse 15. **Altar that was at Bethel**—In Samaria; so that he traversed the land to sweep away every vestige of idolatry.

Note—**A literal and remarkable fulfilment of prophecy at Bethel**—Against that very altar at Bethel, where the guilty Jeroboam burned odious idolatrous incense, a man of God, 326 *years before Josiah's birth*, came forth and cried, "O, altar, altar! thus saith the Lord, Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, *Josiah by name*, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (*see* the narrative 1 Kings xiii. 1-3). No more emphatic verification of prophecy is contained in Scripture.

Verses 21-23. **The revival of the passover festival**—Not only were the king's own subjects called to this august celebration of this most sacred festival, but many of the remnant of Israel also came to the solemnity (*see* 2 Chron. xxxv. 18); not even Hezekiah's celebration of this feast was so complete and imposing as that of Josiah. Verse 26. **Notwithstanding the Lord turned not**—The nation's heart was not changed by all this fervour of the king and the reformation of external worship. Jeremiah's ministry during Josiah's reign shows the gross moral corruption and total spiritual falsity of this hopelessly apostate people. Verses 28-30. **Josiah slain at Megiddo**—Necho, the son of Psammeticus, ascended the throne of Egypt in the twentieth year of Josiah. The two rival monarchies of Egypt and Assyria were then still struggling for ascendancy. Palestine was a coveted frontier territory. From Manasseh's time Judah was tributary to Assyria, and Josiah felt necessitated to rally to Assyria's side against Necho of Egypt. On the Egyptian monarch's way to Charchemish, by the Euphrates, Josiah intercepted his line of advance by meeting him in the great vale of Migeddo, in the plain of Esdraelon. Although Necho remonstrated (Chronicles account), yet Josiah opposed him, and was slain. Verses 31-34. **Jehoahaz**—It was the people's act to raise *Shallum*, Josiah's youngest son, afterwards named Jehoahaz, to the throne in preference to his elder brother Eliakim. This popular choice may be accounted for by Shallum's military spirit (Ez. xix. 3), and his resolute opposition to the Egyptian monarchy; for there were two parties in the Jewish state, the one favouring allegiance with Assyria, the other with Egypt. He was quickly deposed by Necho. Verses 34-37. **Eliakim**, named Jehoiakim by Pharoah-Necho, followed an evil course, and was a reckless ruler. Jeremiah portrays his character most vividly (ch. xxii. 13-19). —W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-24.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GREAT RELIGIOUS REFORM.

I. It is suggested by a clearer understanding of the Divine Word (verse 1). Josiah had begun his reforming work before the discovery of the law, but when he read the very words of God his views were expanded, and his zeal newly inflamed concerning the work he had to do. The effect on the king was like that produced on Luther by his finding an old Latin Bible in the library of the Augustine convent at Erfurt. In both cases, the character and life-work of the reformers were irresistibly influenced by what they read. The best and loftiest work we do, is that which is inspired and sustained by our study of the Divine Word. It is the light and teacher for all time.

> A glory gilds the sacred page
> Majestic, like the sun;
> It gives a light to every age;
> It gives, but borrows none.—*Cowper.*

II. It seeks to interest and, by solemn covenant, secure the co-operation of all classes of the community (verses 1, 2). All genuine reform must be based on intelligence. The people Josiah sought to benefit he sought first to instruct. Too much publicity cannot be given to principles which threaten to change the existing order of things. If they will not bear the light of day,

and the freest public criticism, they are unworthy our adherence. Josiah set the example. It was a striking scene—the more highly dramatic because so utterly unconscious—to see the youthful king publicly entering into solemn covenant to obey the Divine commands. The people followed. In the East, whatever the king initiates and champions, the people readily accept. The broader and more searching the reform, the more important is it to interest all classes and engage all legitimate agencies. The most gigantic efforts of the reformer would be fruitless if unsupported by public opinion. He is shrewd enough to see that the first thing he has to do is to mould and educate public opinion. Hume once observed, "All power, even the most despotic, rests ultimately on opinion."

III. **It aims at the utter destruction of the system, with all its degrading practices, that had led the people astray** (ver. 4-20, 24). Josiah attacked the idolatry of his kingdom with a promptness, zeal, and vigour that amounted almost to fierceness. The evil must be torn out, root and branch. The high places, the images, the vessels, were not only broken in pieces, but defiled, and their ashes scattered on the stream to be borne away for ever. The reformer warmed to his work, and grew fiercer still. He slew the idolatrous priests. He violated the graves of the dead, and burnt their bones on the altar. The reformer became a persecutor. Judging Josiah from the standard of his times, much might be said in palliation of this violence. Idolatry was the oppressive curse under which his kingdom lay crushed. As a theocratic king, he could admit no rival to Jehovah; idolatry must be utterly stamped out. Much may be forgiven a man for the excesses into which he may be betrayed in the heat of his reforming zeal. But no reforming work can be permanently advantaged by violence and persecution. Tyranny never cures tyranny; it only provokes endless reprisals.

IV. **It restores the pure worship of God in its most imposing features** (ver. 21-23). The festival of the Passover was held on an unexampled scale of magnificence and publicity, and in a faithful adhesion to the minute details required by the Divine law that had not been recognized for years. The iconoclastic reformer should be careful to have something to put in place of what he destroys. Man will worship, and every facility should be afforded him in keeping up fellowship with the Highest and Holiest, else he will seek inferior and degrading objects of worship, as did the Hebrews. We must not mistake the reverent and decorous observance of an elaborate ritual for true worship. Acceptable worship must be intelligent, sincere, and spiritual. "If a person were to attend the levee of an earthly prince every court day, and pay his obeisance punctually and respectfully, but at other times speak and act in opposition to his sovereign, the king would justly deem such an one a hypocrite and an enemy. Nor will a solemn and stated attendance on the means of grace in the House of God prove us to be God's children and friends."—*Salter.*

LESSONS:—1. *A genuine reformer regulates his zeal by sound discretion.* 2. *It is difficult to avoid excesses in carrying out great reforms.* 3. *The best reforms are those suggested and carried out by the teachings and spirit of the Divine Word.* 4. *It is an unspeakable gain to the moral life and power of a nation when the true God is better known and worshipped.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-3. The public reading of God's Word.—1. An important and time-honoured institution—instructing the ignorant, and being a testimony to all. 2. A serious loss and injury to a people where neglected.

3. Worthy of the most careful study to do it with efficiency. 4. Stimulates the formation of the best resolves towards God and His service.

— This pious and patriotic king, not content with the promise of his own security, felt, after Huldah's response, an increased desire to avert the threatened calamities from his kingdom and people. Knowing the richness of the Divine clemency and grace to the penitent, he convened the elders of the people, and, placing himself at their head, accompanied by the collective body of the inhabitants, went in solemn procession to the temple, where he ordered the book of the law to be read to the assembled audience, and covenanted, with the unanimous concurrence of his subjects, to adhere steadfastly to all the commandments of the Lord. It was an occasion of solemn interest, closely connected with a great national crisis, and the beautiful example of piety in the highest quarter would exert a salutary influence over all classes of the people, in animating their devotions and encouraging their return to the faith of their fathers.—*Jamieson.*

Verse 1. Instructed by the law and by the prophetess, the king does rest in security, feeling that the evil will not come in his day, but takes immediate measures to instruct the people in the law, and to destroy idolatry throughout the land.

Verse 2. Woe be to them that hide God's book from the people, as they would do ratsbane from the eyes of children! Ignorant souls cannot perish without their murder. There is no fear of knowing too much; there is too much fear of practising too little.—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 4-24. A violent persecution like that of Manasseh must have produced terror, bitterness, stubborn though concealed opposition, and a relentless purpose, on the part of those who had all the law and traditions of their nation, together with patriotism, on their side, and who could compare with pride the moral purity of their religion with those abominations of heathenism which were shocking and abhorrent to the simplest instincts of human nature, to repay their persecutors at the first opportunity. Where those abominations were the only religious observances taught, education might avail to make them pass without protest; but where there was any, even a slight, knowledge of a purer religion and a better morality, the protest could never entirely die out. The Jehovah religion was, as compared with heathen things, austere. It warred against the base passions of men and the vices which they produce. Heathenism therefore seemed to represent enjoyment of life, while the Jehovah religion seemed to repress pleasure. It is remarkable that a boy-king should have chosen the latter. Judaism certainly had intolerance as one of its fundamental principles. Violence in the support of the Jehovah-religion was the duty of a Jewish king. In attempting to account for and understand the conduct of Josiah, it would be senseless to expect him to see and practise toleration, as to expect him to use fire-arms against Necho. We can never carry back modern principles into ancient times, and judge men by the standards of to-day.—*Lange.*

Verse 4. The Kedron winds along the east and south of the city, the channel of which is, throughout a large portion of the year, almost or wholly dry, except after heavy rains, when it suddenly swells and overflows. There were emptied all the impurities of the temple (2 Chron. xxix. 15, 16) and the city. His reforming predecessors had ordered the mutilated relics of idolatry to be thrown into that place of graves and receptacle of filth (1 Kings xv. 13; 2 Chron. xv. 16, xxx. 14); but Josiah, while he imitated their piety, far outstripped them in zeal, for he caused the ashes of the burnt wood, and the fragments of the broken metal, to be collected and conveyed to Bethel, in order thenceforth to associate ideas of horror

and aversion with that place, as odious for the worst pollutions.

Verse 7. Sin—1. Has depths of infamy which the beginner would shudder to contemplate. 2. Finds its readiest and most zealous votaries in idolators. 3. Reigns supreme when God is abandoned. 4. Can be cured only by being thoroughly rooted out.

Verse 8. "The gate of Joshua, the governor of the city."—A great man, but none of the best. He had a good name; but Josiah might have said to him, as Alexander did to a soldier of his own name, but a coward, Either change thy name, or put on more courage; so, more piety.—*Trapp.*

Verse 11. "And burned the chariots of the sun."—Chrysostom saith that Peter, for his zeal, was like a man made all of fire walking among stubble. Josiah was surely so. Angelomus saith, that herein he represented Christ, who, by the fire of the last day, shall destroy all impiety, and not suffer any defiled one to enter into his kingdom.—*Ibid.*

Verse 14. Every monument of idolatry in his dominions was in like manner destroyed, and the places where they stood he defiled by strewing them with dead men's bones. The presence of a dead carcase rendered both persons and places unclean in the eyes both of Jews and heathens.—*Jamieson.*

— He was resolved to make a hand with them all. We may give peace to buy truth, but we may not give truth to buy peace.—*Trapp.*

Verses 15, 16. The unerring certitude of the Divine word.—1. Its threats and promises are faithfully and minutely fulfilled. 2. The flux of time strengthens rather than weakens its authority—350 years had elapsed since the prophecy was uttered. 3. The instrument of accomplishing the Divine word may himself be unconscious of it—Josiah was more intent in destroying idolatry than in fulfilling a Divine prediction.

Verse 15. His zeal as a theocratic sovereign was specially directed against "the high places" reared and consecrated by Israelitish monarchs in all the Samaritan cities, as being indications of the same spirit of disloyalty to Jehovah which the policy of Jeroboam had inaugurated at Bethel and at Dan. But the altar at Bethel which had been sumptuously and elaborately fitted up in the Egyptian style of architecture, and at which the worship of the golden calf was performed with a splendour that rivalled or surpassed the pure ritual celebrated at Jerusalem, was the special object of his abhorrence, both on account of its vicinity to his own kingdom, and the outrage which its establishment, on a spot hallowed by the memory of the patriarch Jacob, inflicted on the feelings of all the pious in Judah.—*Jamieson.*

Verse 16. Intervention of time breaks no square in the Divine decrees; our purblind eyes see nothing but that which touches their lids; the quick sight of God's prescience sees that, as present, which is a world off. —*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 17. Compare with 1 Kings xiii. Lessons from an old tombstone. As we stand by the sepulchre of the man of God, many admonitory lessons press themselves home upon us.

I. That the path of duty is the way of safety. So long as the man of God continued in the path of duty, he was safe. The anger of the king and his command to the bystanders could not harm him a whit. No moral or spiritual danger will befall us if we continue in the path which God marks out for us. "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." II. That the path of duty is the path of power. So long as the man of God was faithful in the discharge of his duty, he had great moral influence. When King Jeroboam's hand withered and his arm became rigid, he had no faith either in his false god, or in the priests who were sacrificing to him. "Entreat the Lord for me," cried the frightened, horror-stricken king. So

it is still. The good man may be persecuted and ridiculed, but often it is seen that the devout man, who continues, despite all trials, "the even tenor of his way," is requested to intercede with God on behalf of those who would have harmed him. But power is lost the moment the good man departs from the right way. III. **The danger of tarrying upon forbidden ground.** The command to the man of God was clear and decisive. He must so appear before the false priests of Jeroboam and deliver his message, and leave the place, that his appearance and disappearance may be startling in their suddenness. He must not return by the same way that he went. But he lingered in the way not far from Bethel. He was upon dangerous ground, and the temptation presented by his seducer was fitted to his physical need and circumstances, as all strong temptation is. He yielded, and we know his fate. Bunyan very quaintly says, after Christian and Hopeful wandered from the right path and found themselves in Doubting Castle, "So I saw it was easier going out of the way when in, than going in when out." IV. **The fearful crime of an enlightened man ruining another.** The old prophet might take up the corpse of the disobedient man of God and attend to its interment, and mourn over him, saying, "Alas, my brother!" but he could not bring back again the lost life. He might charge his sons to bury him with the men of God, adding that the prediction which had been uttered would certainly be fulfilled; but this made no atonement, no separation. The man who will ruin another is a baser man than he who will ruin himself. And be it that this act of disobedience on the part of the man of God was a sin unto the death of the body only—as perhaps the entire context warrants—yet little did he think, when he journeyed from Judah, that he would never return again; and that being entrusted with such a message, and charged with such responsibilities, he should fail in part. Let him, therefore, who stands by his sepulchre, remember the judgment which arrested the man of God, and he will find another illustration of the need of heeding the warning, "Let him that assuredly standeth, take heed lest he fall."—*Hom. Quarterly.*

— This is one of the most remarkable prophecies contained in the Bible. Had the prediction referred to the entire suppression of idolatry throughout the kingdom of Israel, and its reunion with that of Judah in the common celebration of national worship at Jerusalem, the spirit of patriotism would assuredly have kept alive the remembrance of the announcement both in the court and throughout the country, making a consummation so devoutly to be wished the favourite and distinguishing policy of the best kings. But the demolition of the single altar at Bethel was too limited an enterprise, too trivial an act, to stimulate the ambition of a Jewish king, or to continue a subject of interest in the councils of his cabinet; and hence the prophecy seems to have fallen into comparative neglect or oblivion. But not one jot nor tittle of the Divine word ever fails to be fulfilled. God chooses his own time, as well as his own accomplishments of His providential purposes; and although no king of Judah before Manasseh had an opportunity of passing the confines of his kingdom; although Manasseh, with Amon, had not, probably, the slightest knowledge of the prophecy, and was influenced solely by motives of humble penitence and devout gratitude for his own temporal and spiritual deliverance in bestowing the name of Josiah upon his grandson; he was unconsciously, but by an unseen overruling power, led to do what verified the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed to Jeroboam, regarding the overthrow of the altar at Bethel.—*Jamieson.*

Verses 21-24. **The building up of a new life must follow upon the eradication of sin.** The Passover cannot be celebrated until all the old leaven is removed. The Passover was the feast with which each new year

begun; we also have a Passover or Easter lamb (1 Cor. v. 7, 8). The festivals and fasts are the framework of the common life of the congregation; where they are neglected this life is decaying. If Israel had kept up the celebration of its appointed feast, it would never have fallen so low.—*Lange.*

Verse 24. The Bible and reform. 1. The Bible exposes the dangers and abuses of all false systems. 2. Supplies clear and authoritative ideas of what is right, and the most powerful motives to act up to those ideas. 3. Demands that all efforts of reform shall be thorough and complete.

HOMILETICS ON VERSES 25-37.

Failure in the Work of Reformation.

I. **That the work of Reformation may fail, notwithstanding the exemplary character of the principal agent** (verse 25). High praise is here accorded to Josiah. It is usually maintained that Hezekiah equalled or surpassed him in *trusting* Jehovah (xviii. 5), but that he excelled Hezekiah in his scrupulous adherence to the minute details of the Mosaic law. It is, however, evident from this verse that Josiah was also conspicuous for his trust in Jehovah, for he turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might. The eulogy of Josiah, as of Hezekiah, may be regarded as a passage worded after the manner of oriental hyperbole, not to be literally understood, but as intended to distinguish a person who was gifted with specially great qualities. Josiah was the best character that age could produce, and was the fittest to grapple with the abuses that others deplored, but were powerless to rectify. With all the high personal qualifications and supreme royal influence possessed by Josiah, his reforming work was not permanently successful. He was not the first, or the last, great man who has attempted a great and much-needed reform, and failed.

II. **That the work of Reformation fails when it does not prevent the accomplishment of the threatened doom** (verses 26, 27).—After all the colossal and drastic efforts of Josiah to remove the dark curse that lowered over his kingdom and people, we learn from these verses the fateful sentence is still unrepealed. The evil was too deep and inveterate to be easily eradicated. By a comparatively early death, the good king was removed from the evil to come. Scarcely had the wail of lamentation for the popular monarch died away, ere the people relapsed into their former sins. The nation sank into deeper gloom, and the vial of Divine wrath, so long and patiently restrained, was at length poured out. The position of Judah at this time was similar to that of the Netherlands when William the Silent retired for a time from his loved Fatherland, which he felt himself unable to save, and a thunderbolt burst upon the land in the savage onslaught of the Duke of Alva and his butchering army—the thunderbolt that ultimately fell on Israel being Sennacherib and his victorious legions.

III. **That the work of Reformation fails when it does not raise up competent agents to perpetuate its policy** (verses 28-37).—Josiah left no successor, either clerical or lay. The priests whose cause he had so bravely championed, had not the ability, or the will, to press forward the good work; and his two sons—Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim—who held the sceptre but as vassals under the dominating authority of the Egyptian monarch, showed their dislike to their father's reforming work by throwing in their lot with the opposing party. They forsook the God of their father, and became idolaters. A great work of genuine reform usually creates its own agents, who perpetuate and con-

solidate the work, when the pioneer advocate is no more; and there must have been something defective about the plans and methods of Hezekiah's work that failed to do this. "Reformation," says Sir Joshua Reynolds, "is a work of time. A national taste, however wrong it may be, cannot be totally changed at once; we must yield a little to the prepossession which has taken hold on the mind, and we may then bring people to adopt what would offend them if endeavoured to be introduced by violence."

IV. That the work of Reformation fails when it does not thoroughly penetrate the heart and life of every member of the community.—Reform, to be real and abiding, must be personal, convincing the judgment, biassing the will, changing the spirit. "Reform, like charity, must begin at home. Once well at home, how will it radiate outwards, irrepressible, into all that we touch and handle, speak and work; kindling ever new light by incalculable contagion, spreading in geometric ratio, far and wide, doing good only wherever it spreads, and not evil" (*Carlyle*). National evils are thoroughly cured only so far as the individual is morally transformed and exalted.

LESSONS:—1. *The mightiest efforts of reform may come too late.* 2. *The failure of any worthy effort is an occasion of sincere sorrow to the good.* 3. *Failure should lead to self-examination and more complete trust in God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 25-28. We cannot doubt that the sanguinary acts of Josiah, no less than of Elijah and Jehu, are condemned by Him in whom was fulfilled the spirit of the true Deuteronomy, the Revived Law, which the impetuous king carried out only in its external observances, and by its own hard measures. It was the first direct persecution that the kingdom of Judah had witnessed on behalf of the True Religion. Down to this time the mournful distinction had been reserved for the half-Pagan king Manasseh. But cruelty had here, as in all like cases, provoked a corresponding cruelty; and the reformation of Josiah, if from his youth and zeal it has suggested his likeness to our Edward VI., by its harsher features encouraged the rough acts which disfigured so many of the last efforts of that and other like movements of the Christian Church. But, in spite of all this effort, the kingdom of Judah was doomed. Perhaps the very vehemence of the attempt carried with it its own inefficacy. Even the traditions which invested Josiah with a blaze of preternatural glory, maintained that in his day the sacred oil was for ever lost. Too late is written on the pages even which described his momentary revival. It did not reach the deeply-seated, wide-spread corruption which tainted rich and poor alike.—*Stanley.*

Verses 26, 27. The downward course of sin. 1. May reach a depth from which recovery is hopeless. 2. The best considered efforts of reform may fail to arrest. 3. Sinks at last to its inevitable doom.

Verses 29, 30. The hope of Judah. 1. Rose to its brightest zenith amid the reforming efforts of Josiah. 2. Was quenched in that monarch's death. 3. Rose no more in the history of the kingdom. 4. Will revive and burst into perfect glory, only under the sceptre of the Messiah-King.

— The early death of the king was no punishment for him, for he was thus gathered in peace to his fathers; but it was a chastisement for his unrepentant people, who now lamented him, and saw, when it was too late, what noble purposes he had had in their behalf.

Verse 30. His fall caused a universal mourning. Jeremiah wrote a

lamentation for him (Lam. iv. 20). His loss formed the burden of regular songs even after the captivity, when "the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon" was still the type of the deepest national affliction (Zech. xii. 11). Well might such feelings be excited by the battle of Megiddo. That great valley of Esdraelon, the lists of Palestine, the scene of the great victories of Barak and of Gideon, was now stained with a second defeat more disastrous than that in which Saul lost his life. Then it had witnessed the fall of the short-lived dynasty of the people's choice, but now it saw the virtual end of the earthly monarchy of the house of David. Hence may be traced the mystic significance which surrounds the name of this battlefield. The prophet Zechariah employs the mourning of Megiddo as a type of the more wholesome sorrow of Judah, in the day when God shall pour out upon them the spirit of grace and prayer, as a preparation for His final destruction of all the nations that come up against Jerusalem; and his imagery is adopted in the visions of the Apocalypse. On the very scene of the two most signal defeats of Israel and Judah by their most inveterate enemies, the Philistines and Egypt, the seer beholds the mystic "Battle of Armageddon," which avenges all such defeats by the final overthrow of the kings of all the world in the great day of God Almighty" (Zech. xii. 9-14; Rev. xvi. 14-16).—*Dr. Smith's Student's Scripture History.*

— What eye doth not now pity and lament the untimely end of Josiah? Whom can it choose but affect to see a religious, just, virtuous prince, snatched away in the vigour of his age? After all our foolish moan, the Providence that directed that shaft to his fighting place, intends that wound for a stroke of mercy. The God whom Josiah serves, looks through his death at his glory, and by this sudden violence will deliver him from the view and participation of the miseries of Judah. O the wonderful goodness of the Almighty, whose very judgments are merciful! O the safe condition of God's children, whom very pain easeth, whom death revives, whom dissolution unites, whom their very sin and temptation glorifies!—*Bp. Hall.*

Verses 31-37. **Royal automata.** 1. Divested of personal freedom and power, and manipulated by a grasping and imperious will (verses 33-35). 2. Imitating with mechanical helplessness and precision the worst features of wicked predecessors (verses 32-37). 3. Maintained by the privations and sufferings of their subjects (verse 35). 4. Indicate a lowering of natural spirit and prestige.

Verse 32. **The reassertive power of sin.** 1. Repressed for a time by the influence of public reformation. 2. Ready to take advantage of the slightest relaxation of restraint. 3. Defiantly awaits its unavoidable punishment.

Verse 35. "He exacted the silver and the gold of the people." Though he received likely from the subjects no less sums of curses than of coin.—*Trapp.*

Verse 37. Jehoiakin was a most unprincipled and oppressive tyrant. Jeremiah sternly rebukes his injustice and oppression, his cruelty and avarice, and his reckless luxury in building himself a magnificent palace; and contrasts all this with his father's justice to the poor (Jer. xxii 13-19). In the *Chronicles* his name is dismissed with an allusion to "all the abominations that he did." To all his other evils he added this, that he slew Urijah, the prophet (Jer. xxvi. 20, 23).

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FALL OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—**Verse 1. In his days Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon**—Nebuchadnezzar's reign commenced in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's. Hales ("Sacred Chron.") shows that Jehoiakim was made king by Pharaoh-Necho, of Egypt, in July, B.C. 607; whereas Nebuchadnezzar mounted the throne of Babylon January 21, B.C. 604. The Chaldean cylinders place all chronology back by twenty-two years, so that these dates become B.C. 590 for Jehoiakim's accession, and B.C. 586 for Nebuchadnezzar's. This Nebuchadnezzar was son of Nabo-polassar, and founded the Chaldee monarchy. This invasion of Judea occurred in Jehoiakim's fourth year, therefore, in Nebuchadnezzar's first year. **Verse 2. Bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, &c.**—Not an organized army, but a congregate host from various nationalities. These, doubtless, had been compelled to own Nebuchadnezzar's supremacy, and now, in attacking Judah, both gratified their own hostility against this kingdom, and fulfilled Nebuchadnezzar's commands. Joining with the Chaldean troops that were left on the borders, they attacked Judah. **Verse 3. Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah**—The judgments long threatened by God through the prophets Micah, Huldah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah, now began. These bands were but instruments of God, unconsciously working out His behests. **Verse 6. Jehoiakim slept with his fathers**—We have no record of his death; certainly he was not buried in his father's sepulchre. Jeremiah records the reverse of that (*see* Jer. xxii. 18, 19). Probably he died soon after reaching Babylon, burdened with his captive chains; but it is equally probable that he was slain by Nebuchadnezzar, and his corpse cast aside unburied. Certainly he perished ignobly, and at the age of thirty-six. **Verse 8. Jehoiachin was eighteen years old, &c.**—His reign lasted but three months and ten days. For thirty-six years he lingered a captive in Babylon—*i. e.*, through Nebuchadnezzar's lifetime—but was elevated into some dignity and respect by Evil-merodach, who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar (*comp.* chap. xxv. 27-30; Jer. lii. 31-34). With the admonitory example and warning doom of his father before him, this wilful and impious youth defied God and His prophets, and reaped disasters which overwhelmed the entire royal household and the nation. **Verse 12. Jehoiachin, king of Judah, went out to the king of Babylon**—This act, יָצָא describes the *going out to surrender*. Possibly, persuaded thereto by Jeremiah, but improbably so. It might have been a part played in the hope of gaining favour with the enemy, and retaining his throne as vassal. But Nebuchadnezzar was in no mood to show clemency now. **Verses 13-16. He carried away all Jerusalem** (verse 14)—In all, about 10,000 exiles. Only "the poorest of the people" (verse 15) were left. Every article of worth in palace and temple was seized. The land was thus bereft of all those inhabitants who were of value to Jerusalem or useful to Babylon. Jeremiah (xxix. 1) records that priests and prophets were included; and Josephus tells that Ezekiel was among the prophets who were carried away with these exiles (*comp.* Ezek. i. 1-3). The numbers were: 2,000, consisting of the royal household, princes, state officers, priests, and prophets; 1,000 craftsmen; 7,000 warriors. **Verses 17-20. The king of Babylon made Mattaniah king**—An act of grace; instead of sending a foreign viceroy. He was Josiah's third son (1 Chron. iii. 15), brother of Jehoahaz, and uncle of Jehoiakin. **Zedekiah means "*the righteousness of God*," and as a Hebrew name it intimates that he was allowed himself to choose the title by which to dignify his pitiably poor kingship. A false name in its descriptive import, for he was hardened and impious.**—W. H. J.

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-18.

A NATION AT BAY.

WITH the death of Josiah the history of the Judaic Kingdom virtually closes. The historian treats with almost contemptuous brevity the reigns of the last four kings, who were mere puppets of Egypt and Babylon. The period of the remaining twenty-three years, called by Ewald "the death-agony of the nation," is occupied by successive conquests and deportations. The nation is picked at by the invading vulture, bit by bit, till it is picked clean. In the graphic simile of the prophet, the dish is at length emptied and turned upside down. This chapter portrays *a nation at bay*.

I. A pathetic sight when we consider the greatness of its past history. No nation under the sun had been so favoured as Israel. It was called out of

obscurity and was raised into a great nation. From its cradle and throughout its career it was the special ward of heaven. Its pathway was strewn with flowers, margined with mercies, and adorned with brilliant miracles. It was allowed to reach a height of imperial greatness that commanded the honour and astonishment of the mightiest nations in its day. Its soil, its wealth, its culture, its overflowing peace and plenty were the envy of all. But now, see to what unfaithfulness and repeated disobedience has reduced it! How complete a contrast have we here between the expansive greatness and world-wide influence of Solomon, and the lustreless crown and limited resources of Jehoikim! Israel had glittered like a signet ring on the right hand of the Almighty, but it was now plucked off and cast aside (Jer. xxii. 24-26). And yet, in its decay, there is a touch of the old brave spirit which awakens both sympathy and respect.

II. **A pathetic sight when we observe the gigantic forces against which it struggles** (2-4: 10-16). The kinglets and small dependencies that had been accustomed to look up to Judah with awe, now swarmed around her in her downfall, and took a savage delight in inflicting injury and indignity. They pecked at her like a speckled bird, and ceased not while there was a feather left. Behind and above all these was the overshadowing power of Babylon with its vast and invincible army. But the most formidable foe of all was the Friend and Patron whom they had offended beyond remedy (verses 3, 20) Now that Jehovah is against Judah, all her struggles are in vain. And yet, with all these odds against her, Judah obstinately resists. Every one can see the inevitable but herself.

III. **A pathetic sight when it is compelled at length to succumb** (verse 12). It had held out with all the tenacity of despair; to have persisted in opposition would have been fanaticism—madness. Grimly it yields to stern necessity. The sins of Manasseh (verses 3, 4), sins which the people had approved and practised, had stained too deeply the national character, and emasculated the national life. The strength of true bravery is conscious virtue. In the midst of that beleagured city was a man (Jeremiah) whose counsels, if sooner followed, would have led to a different result; and Jehoiachin, like Hezekiah, might have defied the investing forces to do their worst. Even the victor admires the brave and gallant resistance of the foe who is now his captive.

IV. **A pathetic sight when the noblest of its people in rank, usefulness, and moral worth are dragged into ignominious captivity** (verses 14-16). The brain and sinew of the nation were now to be employed in the aggrandisement of a strange land. The impoverishment of Judah was the enrichment of Mesopotamia—the fall of Jerusalem meant the glorifying of Babylon. The favourites of heaven are now the servants of Nebuchadnezzar; the rulers are changed by the fortunes of war into slaves. It is difficult to describe the feelings of the captive emigrants as they took their last look of the Holy City on their march to Babylon. They were leaving behind all they loved and prized most. Jerusalem was never so dear to them as when they were compelled to leave it.

> Who would not bleed with transports for his country,
> Tear every tender passion from his heart
> And greatly die to make a people happy!—*Thomson.*

LESSONS:—1. *A brave nation is slow to believe in its possible extinction.* 2. *The calamities of a nation are all the more painful when conscious they were preventible.* 3. *The nation that discards the Divine protectorate is absolutely defenceless.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1-4. The beginning of the national catastrophe. 1. A desperate but futile attempt to recover national independence (verse 1). 2. The harrassing inroads of combined enemies (verse 2). 3. The forces of destruction are under the Divine sanction (verse 3). 4. The national iniquity attains a malignity and turpitude that utterly forfeit the Divine pardon (v. 4).

Verse 2. This passage describes the irruption of different inorganic bands of freebooters. The time of it may correspond to the time of that Scythian domination of which Herodotus speaks. In such an anarchy, waifs and relics of the different nations, which had been extinguished by the Assyrian Empire, would be gathered together. What the Greek historian describes under one vague general name, would present itself to each particular land as a collection of different neighbouring tribes, one more conspicuous and civilized than the rest as its leader. Nebuchadnezzar now presents himself to us as the head and representative of the Chaldæan race, as the organiser of these loose bands into a new empire, as the conqueror of Egypt, as the Babylonian ruler of his day.—*Maurice.*

Verse 3. The judgment came not merely for the actual sins of that one idolatrous king, but, as the whole course of the history shows, because the nation persisted in a class of sins of which those of Manasseh were most conspicuous representatives.—*Whedon*

Verse 6. A mystery hangs over his death, befitting the gloom and mystery of the times; one account speaking of him as having fallen in a skirmish with a band of raiders, or in a battle with Nebuchadnezzar, and being left unburied; another as having been murdered in Jerusalem, and cast out on the streets; a third, as having been enticed to Nebuchadnezzar's camp, and there put to death, and left without burial. But, whatever the mode of his death, so bitterly was he hated that no funeral dirge was raised for him, though he was the son of Josiah, and his corpse was left thrown out, like that of a dead ass, on the waste land outside the gates of Jerusalem, in the sun by day, and the frost by night. Ultimately, indeed, if we may trust the Septuagint, his dishonoured body was rescued from this last shame, and interred alongside Josiah and Manasseh, in their tomb in the garden of Uzzah, which was connected, apparently, with the royal stronghold on Aphel. But men whispered that on the dried skin of the corpse, as it lay naked before all, the name of the demon, Codonazer, to whom he had sold himself, appeared stamped in clear Hebrew letters.—*Geikie.*

Verse 7. **The fall of a nation** 1. A part of the Divine plan in the government of the world. 2. Removes a prop on which a weaker nation had been accustomed to lean. 3. Prepares the way for the desolating march of Divine vengeance.

— The judgment upon Judea was really a judgment upon all nations. Egypt, the land of the Philistines, the kings of Tyrus, the kings of Sidon, the kings of Arabia, the kings of the mingled people that dwelt in the desert, were all forced to drink of a wine cup of fury which had been mingled for them. It was a time of far-reaching destruction and desolation. The great conqueror, the destroyer of boundaries, had gone forth; God had given the inhabitants of earth into his hands for a certain season; no strength or policy would avert or delay the sentence.—*Maurice.*

— Easy won, easy lost. This has always been the fortune of conquerors; what one has won by robbery and force, another mightier takes from him. The Lord in heaven makes the great small, and the rich poor (1 Sam. ii. 7; Ps. lxxv. 7).

Verses 8-17. A crown lost. 1.

By a stubborn persistence in sin (verse 9). 2. In sheer inability to resist overwhelming numbers (verses 10-12). 3. Involves all its former supporters in degradation and servitude (verses 14-16). 4. Is followed by the total impoverishment of a nation (verse 13.)

Verse 8. Though his reign at Jerusalem was so short and unfortunate, he was looked upon by the exiles as the last lawful successor to the throne of David; and notwithstanding the appointment of Zedekiah, Jehoiachin remained the representative king of Judah, and in the preservation of his life through thirty-seven years of imprisonment, and his elevation to kingly honours in the court of Babylon, the theocratic historian discerned the purpose of Jehovah to perpetuate the throne of David.—*Whedon.*

Verse 12. The incident was never forgotten. Writing after the last fall of Jerusalem, Josephus tells us that as long as the city stood the anniversary of an event so touching was commemorated in the services of the temple as a signal instance of self-sacrifice for the public good. Jehoiachin had gone, with his family, men said, into voluntary captivity, to save the temple from being destroyed, and we may, also, readily believe, to save the city and its inhabitants.—*Geikie.*

Verses 14-16. Liberty lost. 1. When the king is dethroned and captive. 2. When its brave defenders are vanquished and demoralised. 3. When the Fatherland is in the pitiless grasp of a victorious foe.

— The shock of such a calamity was terrible. Nearly a hundred-and-fifty years had passed since the glades beyond the Jordan had resounded with the lamentations of the captives of Gilead, dragged away to Assyria by Tiglath Pileser, and it was over a hundred-and-twenty years since Sargon had marched back to Nineveh, leading the people of the Western half of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes into exile. Assyria had fallen within the last few years, and now itself lay in ruins as desolate as those of the Hebrew cities it had turned into solitudes. But another power had risen as fierce and ruthless, and Judah, the last hope of the chosen people, saw its king and its leading citizens swept off in chains to the Euphrates.—*Geikie.*

— Notice God's mercy and long-suffering even in His judgments. He still allows the kingdom to stand, and turns the heart of the enemy so that he does not yet make an utter end of it (Ezek. xviii. 23, 32).

Verses 18-20. The infatuation of rebellion. 1. Notwithstanding the hopelessness of success. 2. An evidence of the blinding nature of incorrigible sin. 3. Invites and hastens the approach of Divine vengeance.

— The reign of Zedekiah presents us with the most vivid picture of a king and people sinking deeper and deeper into an abyss, ever and anon making wild and frantic efforts to rise out of it, imputing their evil to every one but themselves—their struggles for a nominal freedom always proving them to be both slaves and tyrants at heart.—*Maurice.*

Verse 20. It is characteristic of the high standard of prophetic morality that the violation of this oath, though made to a heathen sovereign, was regarded as the crowning vice of the weak king of Judah.—*Stanley.*

— In the course of God's righteous Providence, his policy as king would prove ruinous to his country. Instigated by ambassadors from the neighbouring states who came to congratulate him on his accession to the throne (Jer. xvii. 3, with xxviii. 1), and at the same time get him to join them in a common league to throw off the Assyrian yoke, Zedekiah rebelled. Though warned by Jeremiah against this step, the infatuated and perjured Zedekiah (Ezek. xvii. 13) persisted in his revolt by forming an alliance with Egypt.—*Jamieson.*

CHAPTER XXV.

THE UTTER DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.—**Verse 1. In the ninth year of his reign**—The revolt of Zedekiah so incensed Nebuchadnezzar that he determined on the final act of the utter spoliation of Judah. With an immense army, which he conducted in person, he swept down upon the northern parts of the country, taking almost all the fenced cities (Jer. xxxiv. 7), and marched direct against Jerusalem to besiege it. He was drawn aside temporarily from the siege to oppose the coming of the Egyptian army to the relief of the Jews. This prolonged the siege to a year and a half. At length (date given in Jer. xxix. 2), at midnight, in our month of July, B.C. 587, when the city was reduced to misery and starvation, an entrance was forced into the lower city on the north side. It was a moment for fearful slaughter (2 Chron. xxxvi. 17; Lam. i. 15). Zedekiah, with his wives and children and guards, fled through an opening made in the wall (Ezek. xii. 12), but were captured in the plains of Jericho, his troops scattered (Jer. lii. 8), he and his family manacled, and marched to Riblah to confront the wrathful Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xxxix. 5). Doomed for his violation of his oath of allegiance to Babylon, Zedekiah was first made to behold the slaughter of his family and courtiers, then his own eyes were put out, and he was carried in chains to Babylon. Verse 8. **Came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard**—A month elapsed, during which the Chaldean princes had probably gone to Riblah to consult the king as to the fate of the city; and they then returned with orders to destroy Jerusalem with fire. While fire consumed the city, foul ravages were committed upon the inhabitants (Lam. v. 11, 12), and desecration heaped upon the dead. Verse 11. **Did Nebuzar-adan carry away**—Among these captives carried off to Ramah (Jer. xxxix. 9) was Jeremiah the prophet (xl. 1). Pilgrims from around afterwards came to wonder and bewail over the ruined city (Jer. xli. 5, 6). Verse 21. **So Judah was carried away out of their land**—This was the end of the Israelitish monarchy; but the last king who occupied the throne of the House of David, and called himself "*The Righteousness of God*," צִדְקִיָּהוּ (*Tsidkiyahu*), but falsified such a name, left the throne vacant until He should come who was truly "The Righteousness of God," and the Eternal King, predicted by Jeremiah as יְהוָה צִדְקֵנוּ (*Jehovah Tsidkenu*), "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

Verses 22-26. **Gedaliah's rule**—This Gedaliah had been Jeremiah's firm and trusted friend through the period of the prophets' struggles (*comp.* Jer. xxvi. 24), and is described by Stanley as "a man of a generous, genial nature, such as might have rallied the better spirits of the men around him, and taken the place of the fallen dynasty." Against him Ishmael conspired. This Ishmael was the most conspicuous of a band of chiefs who fled across the Jordan during the siege. There he became closely leagued with Baalis, king of Ammon (Josephus, *Antiq.* x. 9, 2); and prompted by him, as well also as coveting Gedaliah's power, he plotted his assassination (Jerem. xl. 1). Then, contrary to Jeremiah's dissuasions, the whole people turned to Egypt for protection against the Chaldean king. Verse 27. **Evil-merodach did lift up the head of Jehoiachin**—It was on the occasion of his accession to the throne of Babylon, upon Nebuchadnezzar's death. **Spake kindly to him**, &c. (verse 28)—Gave him liberty upon *parole*. This kindness is traced to a record that Evil-merodach himself was a fellow-prisoner with Zedekiah, in consequence of some antipathy of Nebuchadnezzar towards him, and that a sympathetic goodwill towards the captive king was engendered. Yet had not God declared that though, for their apostasy the seed of David should be severely chastised, yet they should not be utterly abandoned (2 Sam. vii. 14, 15)? And to the captives in Babylon it was a promise of good things to come, when the term of their exiled lot should close, and merciful deliverance should reach them according to the good promises of the Lord God.—**W. H. J.**

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1-30.

THE LAST DISMAL SCENES IN A NATION'S OVERTHROW.

Nothing of interest remains to be recorded of king or people. The historian is chiefly concerned in this chapter in relating how unmistakeably the Divine Word was fulfilled in the total overthrow of Jerusalem. The city was sacked, its palaces and public buildings demolished, and its massive walls pulled down. And the Temple—the house of Jehovah, the pride of the Hebrews, the pivot of their national history, the lament of the pious to this day—was pillaged, dismantled, burnt to the ground, and its sacred vessels and furniture broken and scattered.

I **Here we have all the horrors of siege and famine** (ver. 1-3). The Babylonish hosts, like a flock of vultures with outspread wings, closely invested the fated Jerusalem as if eager to devour it. The hour of final doom rapidly approached. A sword furbished, sharpened, and glittering, seemed to leap from the Divine scabbard, like that which, in the siege of Titus, was believed to flame across the heavens. The blockade was so complete that the besieged were reduced to great extremities. Hunger fastened upon them with its remorseless grip, and under its maddening torture the most inhuman atrocities were committed. The fathers ate their sons, and sons their fathers; and the pestilence consumed what hunger spared (Lam. ii. 20, 22; iv. 9, 10; Ezek. v. 10). In all this we see the dire fulfilment of the prophetic denunciations hurled against an apostate people (Lev. xxvi. 29; Deut. xxviii. 53-57; Jer. xv. 2; xxvii. 13; Ezek. iv. 16).

II. **Here we have a desperate but unavailing effort to escape** (ver. 4-6). The ponderous enginery of the Chaldees battered down the outer wall, and admitted a stream of the besieging forces into the northern part of the city. Seized with fear and weakened with famine, the king and his brave defenders made a night sally towards the Jordan Valley, with the hope of effecting an escape. But too many Chaldean eyes were awake, the retreat was cut off, and the king and his party captured. The toils of the Babylonian net were too thickly and widely spread to admit of successful flight; and the military strategy of Nebuchadnezzar was favoured by the avenging power of heaven.

III. **Here we have a king cruelly degraded** (ver 7). Perfidious and rebellious as Zedekiah undoubtedly was, his punishment was a horrible example of the barbarity of the times. The last sight on which he gazed was the butchery of his own sons, and then he was rendered for ever incapable of ruling by his eyes being gouged; that—as Bishop Hall strongly puts it—"his sons might be ever dying before him, and himself in their death ever miserable." This painful incident fulfilled two prophecies that were apparently contradictory of each other: that Zedekiah should come to Babylon, but should not see it (Jer. xxxii. 5; xxxiv. 3; Ezek. xii. 13; xvii. 16). The last vassal king of Judah perished in a Babylonian prison. His was a life of religious vacillation, of stirring incident, of frightful carnage, of suffering and shame.

IV. **Here we have a great and world-famed city utterly demolished** (ver. 8-12). The Babylonian conqueror was not satisfied with the subjection of the Jewish people; his rage extended to the buildings in which they lived and worshipped. The celebrated buildings for which David had made such elaborate and wealthy preparations, and which Solomon had erected with infinite labour, and adorned with so much pomp and magnificence, were ruthlessly destroyed with fire and crowbar. Jerusalem, which was invincible, and had for centuries maintained a proud pre-eminence, while Jehovah was acknowledged and worshipped within its walls, was no sooner forsaken by that guardian Presence, than it shared the fate of many a great heathen city, and was levelled with the dust. The mightiest city cannot long survive the loss of virtue and religion; walls and bastions are no protection when the garrison is demoralised.

V. **Here we have the sacred vessels of the Temple contemptuously broken, and the chief officers of religion savagely massacred** (verses 13-21). Persons, places, and things lose the sacredness which, like the delicate bloom of fruit, was their adornment and glory, when they are Divinely abandoned. The blessing changes into a curse that blackens, disfigures, and destroys. Years before Jeremiah had predicted that even the vessels of the Temple should be

carried away to Babylon; but, like Cassandra, though he spake the truth, he was fated not to be believed. Little did the sacrilegious Babylon care for the sacred uses and hallowed associations of the Temple furniture and little did he understand that he was, after all, to be the safe custodian of those relics till better days should dawn for Israel, when they should again resume their place and office in a purified temple (Jer. xxvii. 21, 22). The priests and other temple officers were nothing in the eyes of the exasperated destructionists but so many rebels and instigators of sedition; and they shared the same fate as the shrine they had disgraced.

VI. Here we have, as the last record of the national remnant, a scene of conspiracy, assassination, and flight (verses 22-26). The sagacious Nebuchadnezzar did not leave the country without some form of government, and Gedaliah was, perhaps, the best adapted for the post of governor or overseer. He saw it was infatuation to contend with the Chaldees, and was disposed to rule the land in submission to their authority. But the prospect of rest and peace was dissipated with the plottings of envy. Once more the land is torn with faction and stained with bloodshed. Stricken with fear and despair, the feeble remnant fled into Egypt, where their forefathers had been enslaved, and from which they had been miraculously delivered, and where greater troubles awaited them than those from which they sought to escape. Such is the grim irony of history; the people who had sprung from poverty and serfdom, after a brilliant career among the foremost nations of the earth, sank again into poverty and serfdom!

VII. Here we have, as a relief to the dismal series of panoramic pictures, a commendable instance of royal clemency towards a captive prince (verses 27-30). It could not but add bitterness to the grief of the exiles, as they sat by the waters of Babylon and wept, to know that two of their monarchs were miserable tenants in prison garments, in one of the dungeons of the city—the lamented Jehoiachin and the sightless Zedekiah. After thirty-seven years' imprisonment, on the death of Nebuchadnezzar, his captor, Jehoiachin was released, and treated with great kindness and distinction by the successor to the Chaldean throne. It was some compensation for the dreary years of humiliation he had endured, that the last years of his life were spent amid brighter surroundings. Jehoiachin represented the faded glory of Israel; and the last reference made to him in the history suggests a faint hope of the future restoration and elevation of his unhappy people. "Doubtless, the improvement in Jehoiachin's condition is to be traced to the overruling providence and grace of Him who still cherished purposes of love to the House of David" (2 Sam. 14, 15).—*Jamieson.* The longest, weariest, darkest night comes to an end, and the long looked for dawn breaks at length, bringing rest, and hope, and gladness with its expanding light.

LESSONS:—1. *The power of a great conqueror is sometimes used to inflict Divine punishment for sin.* 2. *The destruction of the most highly favoured nation does not frustrate the progress and triumph of the Divine purpose.* 3. *In national as in individual life, the greatest sufferings are not unmixed with blessings.*

HOMILETICS OF VERSES 8-21.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

I. Was a calamity of world-wide significance. It was the grand catastrophe of the Jewish nation. The other cities of Palestine were insignificant: they were all subsidiary to, and received the law from, the great Metropolitan. Its influence dominated and governed the nation. In its midst *the Temple*

reared its stately pile, the political and religious centre of the State, the basis and bond of the national unity. When the Temple fell, the national life was smitten, the national hope extinguished. The Jews fought with unexampled desperation, and endured incredible sufferings (ver. 3, 18-21) in defence of the holy city; and to the last clung with dogged pertinacity to the very ruins of the Temple (ver. 18). Other great cities have fallen; but their loss has not been mourned with a pathos and a grief like that which is continued by the wailing Israelites to this day. The significance of such a downfall dilates itself through the centuries, and stands out as a warning-beacon to the great cities of modern times.

II. **Was a Divinely-declared punishment for persistent disobedience.** The decline and fall of great cities have been traced to the inevitable operation of natural and universal forces. Gibbon attributes the ruin of Rome to the injuries of time and nature, the hostile attacks of the barbarians and Christians, the use and abuse of the materials, and the domestic quarrels of the Romans; and thus he seeks to eliminate the operation of a Divine retributive Providence. But the movements of the Divine Hand cannot be eliminated from the fall of Jerusalem, though we may trace the action of similar causes to those which have wrecked the fortunes of other great cities. While Israel remained true to Jehovah, the city was invincible and impregnable; and it was only after unparalleled obstinacy in sin that Jerusalem was abandoned to its fate (Amos iii. 2; Lev. xxvi.; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14-17; Jer. xxv. 8, 9). This mournful truth is admitted by the Jews with sighs and tears.

III. **Was a solemn and impressive proof to all ages of the Divine fidelity and justice.** The promises and threatenings of the Divine Word have been faithfully fulfilled, and the Divine justice fully vindicated. "In the history of the Jewish State this great truth is clearly and powerfully impressed, that, as "righteousness exalteth a nation, so sin is the reproach of any people"—(Prov. xiv. 34)—a lesson which, but for the immediate and extraordinary Providence displayed in this awful dispensation, could never have been so forcibly inculcated, or so clearly understood"—(*Graves*). The Jews are living witnesses to-day of the truth and faithfulness of God—

> Amazing race! deprived of land and laws,
> A general language, and a public cause;
> With a religion none can now obey,
> With a reproach that none can take away;
> A people still, whose common ties are gone;
> Who, mixed with every race, are lost in none.—*Crabbe.*

Lessons:—1. *A city where piety predominates is a great power for God.* 2. *The most strongly-fortified city may become a tomb in which its wicked inmates are interred.* 3. *The holiest and most renowned city is degraded and ruined by sin.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Verse 3. Famine. 1. A more formidable enemy to contend with than an armed force. 2. Shows how rapidly consumption follows in the wake of production—it is like the Salt Sea swallowing the Jordan. 3. One of the most dreaded evils of war.

Verse 7. A suffering captive. 1. To the humiliation of defeat is added the excruciating agony of destroyed eye-sight. 2. It would intensify the pangs of the sufferer that the last sight on which his eye rested was the cruel massacre of his own sons. 3. The man who acts the traitor and rebel exposes himself to severe penalties. 4. It tarnishes the reputation of the mightiest conqueror to needlessly torture his helpless victim. 5. War is a prolific source of human misery.

— The eyes of whose mind had been put out long before, else he migh

have foreseen and prevented this evil —as prevision is the best means of prevention—had he taken warning by what was foretold (Jer. xxxii. 4; xxxiv. 3; Ezek. xii. 13). The Dutchmen have a proverb: When God intends to destroy a man, He first puts out his eyes.—*Trapp.*

Verses 8-17. Three other like events of parallel magnitude have been witnessed: the fall of Babylon, as the close of the primeval monarchies of the ancient world; the fall of Rome, as the close of the classical world; and, in a fainter degree, the fall of Constantinople, as the close of the first Christianized empire. But, in the case of Jerusalem, both its first and second destruction have the peculiar interest of involving the dissolution of a religious dispensation, combined with the agony of an expiring nation, such as no other people or city has witnessed, such as no other people have survived, and, by surviving, carried on the living recollection, first of one, then of the other, for centuries after the first shock was over.—*Stanley.*

Verse 9. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the wonder of all times, the paragon of nations, the glory of the earth, the favourite of heaven, how art thou now become heaps of ashes, hills of rubbish, a spectacle of desolation, a monument of ruin! If later, yet no less deep hast thou now pledged that bitter cup of God's vengeance to thy sister Samaria! Four hundred and thirty-six years had that temple stood, and beautified the earth, and honoured heaven; now, it is turned into rude heaps. There is no prescription to be pleaded for the favour of the Almighty: only that temple not made with hands is eternal in the heavens. Thither he graciously brings us, for the sake of the glorious High Priest, that hath once for all entered into that holy of holies.—*Bp. Hall.*

— Those of the captivity bewailed destruction of Jerusalem by an nal fast (Zech. vii.; Ps. cxxxvii.) Jews at this day, when they a house, leave one part of it unfinished, in remembrance that Jerusalem and the Temple lie desolate. At least they leave about a yard square of the house unplastered, on which they write in great letters: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, &c.;" or else the words, "The memory of the desolation."—*Trapp.*

Verses 13-17. **The changing aspects of religious work.** 1. That religious work is carried on with a great variety of instrumentalities (verses 14, 15). 2. That the value of religious work depends on the strength and symmetry of moral character (verses 13, 16, 17). 3. That there are Chaldean enemies ever ready to destroy character and depreciate religious work (verse 13).

Verses 18-21. **Official responsibility.** 1. Demands that the post of duty should be the more tenaciously held in time of danger. 2. Exposes to the first and fiercest attacks of the enemy. 3. Involves great suffering, and even death itself (verse 21), in trying times. 4. Often makes one long for the peace and security of the poor and obscure (verse 12).

Verse 18. These likely were fired out of those secret corners of the temple where they lay hid. Our chroniclers tell us that William the Conqueror, firing the city Mayence in France, consumed a church there, in the walls whereof were enclosed an anchoret, who might but would not escape, holding it a breach of his religious vow to forsake his cell in that distress. At the last destruction of Jerusalem, certain Jews who had taken sanctuary in the Temple came forth when it was on fire, and besought the emperor Titus to give them quarter for their lives; but he refused so to do, giving this for a reason, which, indeed, was no reason—Ye deserve not to live, who will not die with the downfall of your Temple.—*Trapp.*

Verse 21. "So Judah was carried away out of their land." **The curse and the blessing of the exile.** I. The curse consisted in this, that the Lord removed the people from before

his face (chap. xxiii. 27; xxiv. 3, 20); that is, He removed them from the land of promise, in which he gave them his gracious blessings, and placed them in a distant country, where nothing was known of the true and living God. This curse, which had long been threatened (Levit. xxvi. 33; Deut. iv. 27; xxviii. 26; Dan. ix. 11) is a proof of the truth of the words, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, &c." (Gal. vi. 7). God still does spiritually to individuals and to nations what he did to Judah—He removes them from before His face; He removes from them His word and His means of grace, if they do not repent, and leaves them to live in darkness, without Him. II. The curse became a blessing for this people. It humiliated itself and repented. It experienced that there was no greater curse than to live far from its gracious God, and it longed for the land of promise. When it had lost its earthly kingdom and its earthly king, it learned to look for the kingdom of heaven, and for that One in whom all God's promises to man are fulfilled. The exile became a blessing for the whole world, for the Jewish nation was thereby made fit to fulfil its destiny in the redemptive plan of God. It was "a great opportunity, by which the name and glory of Jehovah were spread abroad, as a preparation for the preaching of the gospel of Christ" (*Starke*). We all lay under the curse of the law, but Christ has redeemed us (Gal. iii. 13, 14).—*Lange*.

— The mercy, the justice, and the wisdom of God are all equally displayed in this event. His *mercy* appears in bringing this judgment so gradually—from less to greater, during the space of twenty-two years—so that most ample warning was given, and abundant opportunity of repentance was afforded. That it was a most *just* punishment for their sins no one ever questioned, and the Jews themselves have constantly admitted it, even with tears. It was, in particular, a most righteous punishment of their idolatry, as Moses had long ago foretold in Lev. xxvi., where the *succession* of the Divine judgments is most remarkably traced out. But the *wisdom* of God is also seen here. He did not mean utterly to cast off His people, and he therefore brought them under this great affliction, because, as had too plainly appeared, nothing less would suffice to purify them, and turn their hearts from the love of idols. It is certain that after this captivity—and under occasional inducements, as strong as any to which they had ever been subjected in former times—there was never among them the least tendency to idolatry, but the most intense and vehement abhorrence of it, as the true cause of all their ancient miseries—so deep and salutary was the impression made upon them by this great affliction, and so effectual the cure.—*Kitto*.

— While the work of destruction was carried on by the Chaldean army, it was viewed with malignant exultation by the nations which had so long chafed beneath the yoke of their kinsman Israel. The Ammonites cried "Aha!" against the sanctuary, when it was profaned; and against the land of Israel when it was desolate; and against the house of Judah when they went into captivity. Moab and Seir said, "Behold the house of Judah is like unto all the heathen." The more active enmity, which was but natural in the Philistines, who "took vengeance with a despiteful heart, to destroy it for the old hatred," was emulated by Edom, the nearest kinsman and bitterest rival of his brother Israel. All these nations soon fell victims to the like fate, which the prophets again and again denounce upon them.—*Dr. Smith's Student's Scrip. History*.

Ver. 22-26. The last vestige of government in Judah. 1. Might have been an important rallying point for the scattered remnant. 2. Was destroyed by the blind infatuation of envy. 3. When destroyed, completed the desolation of the country.

Verse 25. We see by the example of Israel, how envy and jealousy, pride in high descent, and destiny, and love of power, lead to the most utter ruin. Passion makes men fools. Ishmael could not hope with his small

company to resist the Chaldean power. —*Lange.*

— Self-love and envy teach men to turn the glass to see themselves bigger and others lesser than they are.

— An envious spirit. 1. Cannot brook a superior. 2. Is disquieted with ambitious and wicked designs. 3. Does not hesitate to commit the worst crimes to attain its ends. 4. Loses the prize at which it clutches. (Jer. xli. 15).

Verse 26. When the godless attempt to flee from a calamity they plunge themselves into it (Isa. xxiv. 17).—*Starke.*

— Jeremiah lived on in the land to see the misery and anarchy which followed the murder of Gedaliah; to tell the Jews who were flying to Egypt that if they stayed in the land they would be safe, that in Egypt they would meet with destruction—for that Egypt had been given up to the king of Babylon—finally to sing the future ruin of Babylon itself; the confusion and breaking in pieces of her idols, the deliverance of those in whose destruction and desolation she had rejoiced.—*Maurice.*

Ver. 27-30. The release and preferment of Jehoiachin suggestive of the future restoration of his exiled people. 1. Their captivity, like his, might be painful and prolonged. 2. As in his case, a prince might arise who would have compassion on their sufferings. 3. As in his experience, they might be restored to freedom and comparative prosperity. 4. The darkest distress is not without some ray of hope.

— The new king, Evil Merodach, having no such personal feeling against Jehoiachin as had swayed his father, strove to atone for the long sufferings of the unfortunate exile by setting him free, and entertaining him thenceforward at the royal table in suitable splendour. Legend has brightened the story of his last days, describing him as living on the Euphrates, in a sumptuous house, surrounded by a spacious paradise, and married to the fairest woman of his day, the chaste Susannah, the companion of the king of Babylon, and the chief personage of and high judge among the captives. It is added, moreover, that amidst all, he was still mindful of his native land, listening, with his brethren, to Baruch as he read the prophecies before them, and amidst weeping, fasting, and prayer, sending off help to the remnant of his people in Jerusalem. But this touching picture is only a creation of national pride, to adorn with a fictitious prosperity the closing years of the last direct heir to the Jewish crown.—*Geikie.*

Verse 29. The like whereto befel Joseph, whose fetters one hour changed into a chain of gold, his rags into robes, his stocks into a chariot, his goal into a palace. So God turned again the captivity of Job, as the streams in the South.—*Trapp.*

Verse 30. So is, or might be, every true believer's portion; who should therefore "eat his bread with joy, and drink his wine with cheerfulness all the days of his life," which are not to be numbered by the hours, but measured by spiritual mirth; as monies are not by tale, but by value.—*Ibid.*

Great principles illustrated in the books of Kings.

I. *That the Divine purpose in raising up the Jewish nation as a means of conveying greater blessing to the world is steadily kept in view.*

II. *That the nation is prospered and strengthened in proportion to its fidelity to the Divine purpose.*

III. *That the ambition to form foreign alliances was contrary to the fundamental law of the theocracy, and led to the introduction of the idolatry which ultimately wrought the nation's ruin.*

IV. *That a nation, as an individual, cannot be purged of great evils without great suffering.*

V. *That God is slow to punish, and delays the final blow till all possible means of reclamation are exhausted.*

VI. *That great emergencies bring to the front the noblest and most highly gifted talent of the nation.*

VII. *That the unfaithfulness and vice of the Jewish people did not prevent the carrying out of the Divine purpose.*

VIII. *That true religion can alone give greatness and permanence to national life.*

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